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HELLO

After a long, dark winter, I expect you're as desperate as I am to get back out in your campervan at the first opportunity. Thankfully, with the days getting warmer and the nights shorter, the new season has definitely arrived. As well as planning your trips, this is the time to make sure you've got everything you need for your future adventures, from toilet chemicals to gas barbecues.

Speaking of stocking up on essentials, did you know you can buy all manner of accessories from our website? There are a huge amount of products at **outandaboutshop.co.uk** that come recommended by our experienced editors, so you can shop in the confidence that your money is being well spent.

And if you need recommendations for new gear, check out the Out & About Live Camping Awards; in this issue, we've highlighted some of the key 2025 winning products that are perfect for campervanners.

Iain

IAIN DUFF | Editor

COVER PICTURE Laura-Liisa Klaas

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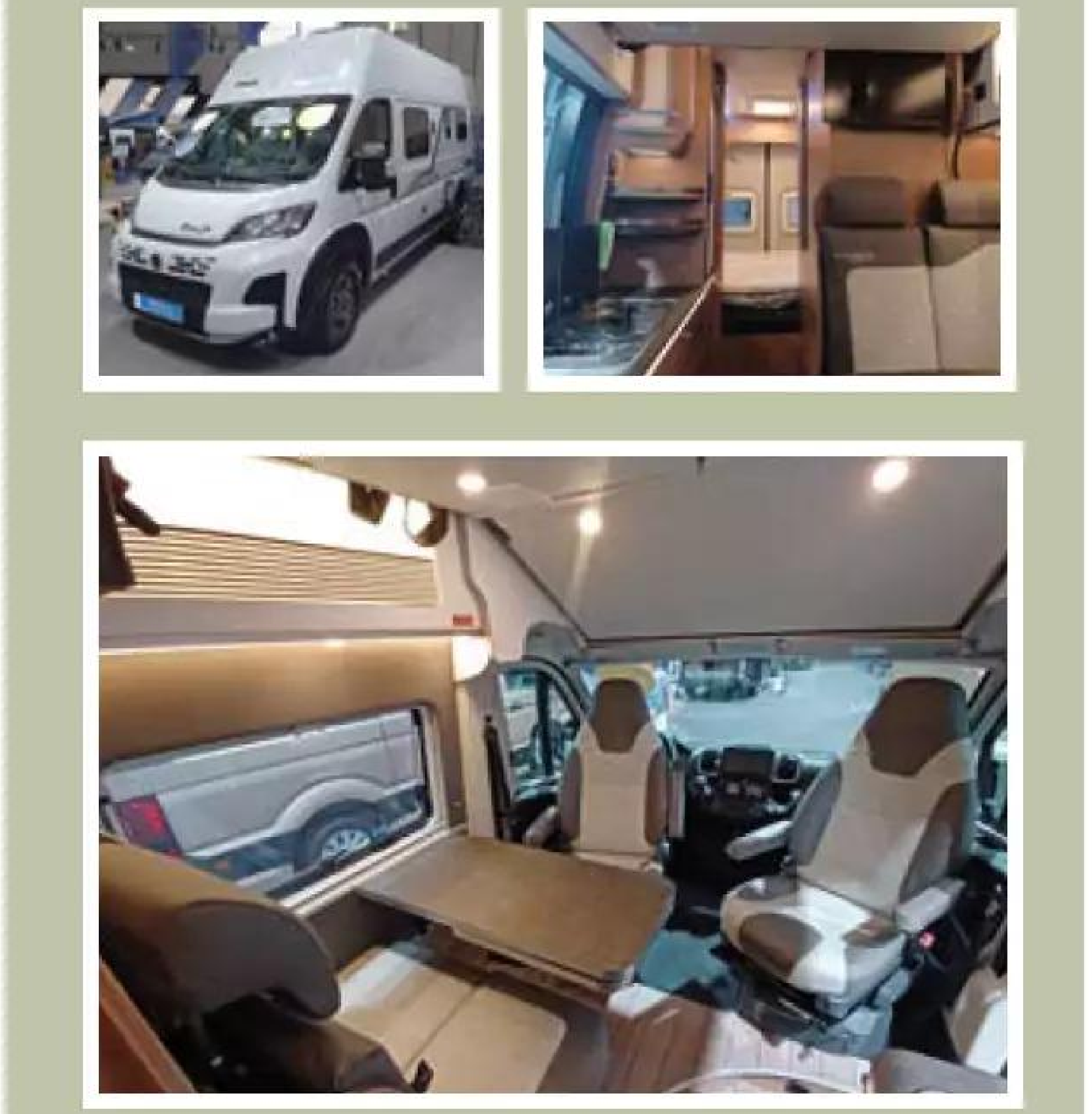

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RUTLAND

45
anglianwater Rutland Water

It's often said that great things come in small packages and Rutland, England's smallest county, certainly lives up to that. What it lacks in size, it makes up for in things to do... with a mix of history, nature and leisure. At its heart is Rutland Water, a vast reservoir ideal for walking, cycling and birdwatching.

Oakham, the county town, boasts a historic castle and a vibrant market, while nearby Uppingham is known for its independent shops and galleries. Just over the border in Lincolnshire is the lovely town of Stamford. Food lovers can explore local produce at traditional pubs and farm shops.

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ISLANDS IN THE SUN

Laura and Paul head over the sea to Skye (and beyond)

Words & pictures
Laura-Liisa Klaas

It had started to become a little bit of a problem; having lived in Scotland for 15 years, we still hadn't properly visited any of its beautiful islands.

Yes, we had ventured onto Skye a couple of times, but it's not the same if you can just cross a bridge to reach it. What I'm talking about here are islands that you have to sail, fly or swim to.

So we – meaning me, my partner, my twin and her partner, along with our dog, Dolce – decided to rectify this oversight by booking a night on Skye and then a few more on Harris and Lewis. I must add that Dolce had no emotional involvement in the planning of this trip!

The first day of our Skye-Harris-Lewis adventure started off excruciatingly early at 6am. The weather in Aberdeenshire was uncharacteristically warm for the miserable Scottish summer, and nature's colours had not yet achieved their full vibrancy for the day.

Four hours and a few pee and coffee breaks later, we arrived at Eilean Donan Castle, having passed

MAIN PICTURE
Luskentyre beach in all its glory

INSET
Laura, Paul and Dolce with their van

ABOVE LEFT TO RIGHT Castle Ewe

Whale Bone Arch on Isle of Lewis

Inverness and Loch Ness en route. The weather had – in true Scottish fashion – stopped being nice and was now "weathering" instead, but we admired the misty castle from the land.

The iconic castle was built in the thirteenth century and is situated at the meeting point of three lochs – Loch Long, Loch Alsh and Loch Duich. It is a stunning landmark and we will definitely return and pay the entry fee and visit the inside of the castle one day.

A short drive later, we crossed the bridge to Skye, where our first port of call was Lean To Coffee. This is a small independent café in Ashaig village, serving lovely toasties and, in my case, a spiced hot chocolate with adaptogenic superfoods. I know, very boujee, but I regret nothing and it was absolutely delicious. Plus, I probably have been given superpowers or something, now.

Fed and watered, our next stop was at the Fairy Pools, where the sky was overcast and midges were everywhere. The pathway took us first down into the valley of Coire na Creiche and then upwards again to Glen Brittle, passing various pools created by the cascading River Brittle. We were back at the car park about an hour and 15 minutes later, wet but not unhappy thanks to the lovely views of the pools and the lower half of the Cuillin mountain range we had experienced both ways. Unfortunately, the top half remained firmly out of sight due to low hanging clouds.

We finished our day at Portree, the capital town of the island, with a rainy walk to its famous multicoloured buildings on the quaint harbourside, and to get some grub from the chippy. Having eaten our supper in the 'van – misting up the windows to no end – we only had about a six-minute drive to our home for the night, Portree Campsite.

✔ TOP TIPS

Drive with caution on Lewis and Harris as there are a lot of blind corners behind which lazy sheep might lie – right in the middle of the road.

The gravel pitch with electric hook-up was decently sized and came with a picnic bench and good showers and toilets. Even the sun peeked out from behind the clouds and we finally got to see the mountaintops again!

Next day, we packed up and headed for breakfast at Portree, more specifically at Café Arriba. We remembered the café, with exceptional views over the harbour, from a previous visit years ago and I finally managed to satisfy my hunger for the nachos with sweet chilli sauce. Honestly, try it!

The sky was again more on the moody side, but we did not let this stop us visiting the Fairy Glen. The mile-long circular walk took us about 30 minutes past hills resembling Hobbiton, apparently created by landslides over 100,000 years ago. The views from the top of the conical hillocks overlooking the glen were picturesque and you can definitely understand why this area is linked to fairy mythology. One can also climb onto Castle Ewen, a basalt hilltop resembling a ruined fort.

Our short stay on Skye had to come to an end, though, as we had booked a ferry from Uig to Tarbert

OUR 'VAN

Laura and Paul enjoy roaming the country in their converted Volkswagen T5.1 campervan. The ex-RAC van is lovingly called the Tangerine Machine and you can follow their domestic – and hopefully soon foreign – travel on Instagram **@the_tangerinemachine**

on Harris. The journey on the Caledonian MacBrayne vessel took the best part of two hours and the ferry company has very much catered for the dog-owning crowd, as our pooch had a separate area with seats reserved for those with pet tickets, as well as access to the outside viewing platform.

Once on the rugged and picturesque Isle of Harris, Horgabost Campsite was a short 20-minute drive away, passing the most amazing landscapes complete with the bluest water and whitest sandy beaches we have ever seen in Scotland. Seriously, it was like a postcard from the Mediterranean.

The campsite was on the slopes adjacent to Horgabost Beach and had a small toilet and shower block at the beach car park, as well as a small kitchen to wash your dishes and even a fridge for campers to use.

Unpacked and more familiar with the campsite and our surroundings, my sister and I could not resist the beckoning blue any longer and we dipped in, bum cheeks only slightly cramping from the cold of the North Atlantic. Post swim, what better way to unwind than with some barbecue and wine? We concluded, sitting smugly in our rickety camping chairs, that life really is good.

After fulfilling our duties as tourists at the Harris Tweed shop, we headed north to roam around the Isle of Lewis. Lewis and Harris, also called “Lewis with Harris”, are not separated, but are actually a single island, with Harris occupying the more southern and smaller end and Lewis spanning the bigger and less mountainous northern area.

We decided to circle Lewis first, leaving Harris for the next day. Due to us only having two full days and two half days here, this was the sure way to see most of what the place had to offer.

Past the imaginary border over to Lewis, our first port of call was the Calanais Standing Stones, imposing stones in cross-shaped formation,

ABOVE RIGHT
Fairy Pools, Skye

BELOW
The cat of the Temple café on Harris

> **WE ENJOYED A COFFEE OVERLOOKING THE SALT MARSH AND INLET, WHERE BIRDS FROLICKED, CHASING EACH OTHER**

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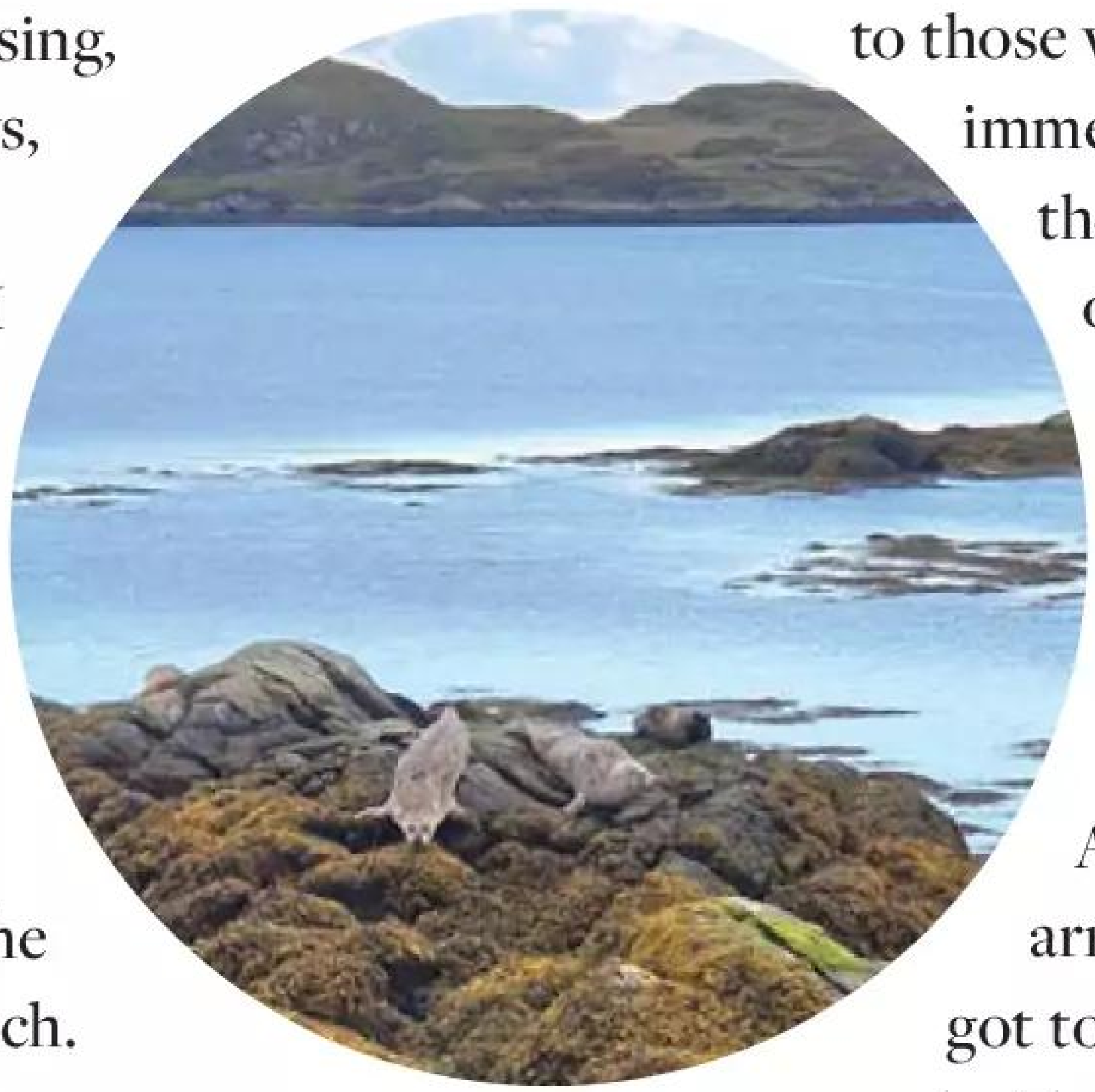
dating back 5,000 years and used presumably for astronomical observations. The stones are also featured in advertising, films and TV shows, including *Outlander*, which I thought was very neat, indeed.



A stone's throw (if you excuse the pun) – or a 13-minute drive – away was the Dun Carloway Broch. Brochs are roundhouses built in Scotland during the Iron Age. This one is now a ruin, but you can still just about see its full length of 9m as it stands proudly on top of a hill, overlooking the surrounding landscape.

It was probably built around 200BC and has thick walls, within which staircases can still be seen, leading up to the higher levels of the construction. I may have almost fallen to my death climbing these stairs unassisted.

Another short distance away was the historic Gearrannan Blackhouse Village. The village, built in the 1800s, has been restored honouring the original ways and it is open to visitors, as well as offering self-catering and hostel accommodation to those who would like to immerse themselves in the traditional way of living for longer. It had an entrance fee of about £5.50 and since two whole buses of ageing American tourists arrived right after we got to the full car park, we decided to look at the huts from behind the gate this time.

We drove on to Shawbost Norse Mill and Kiln instead, where the small and empty car park was a sight for sore eyes. A short walk led to the two stone huts, complete with thatched roofs, that still contain the old mill in one and, in the other, the kiln to process barley grain, powered by the stream that runs past the huts.

Then it was off to the north of Lewis and the Whale Bone Arch. The jaw bones belonged to a 24m blue whale that was harpooned and beached in nearby Bragar Bay in 1920. A local merchant by the name of Murdo Morrison had been the villager's spokesperson regarding the disposal of the whale carcass and wanted the jawbone as a memento and a perfect arch for his garden gateway. The considerably shortened and now resin and fibreglass clad arch is still in someone's garden, but the young lad painting the fence in his socks kindly allowed us to take some photos.

All this exciting adventuring left us absolutely famished. On Lewis and Harris, however, one needs to plan ahead for food, as grub is not as readily available as on the mainland. Thankfully, we managed a late lunch at the roadside hotel restaurant and were able to enjoy some lovely, albeit pricey, sandwiches.

About a half an hour drive later, we arrived at the northernmost tip of the island – at Butt of Lewis Lighthouse, the name of which made us giggle like schoolkids. I know, mature. Built in 1862, this 37-metre tower has also been claimed in the Guinness Book of Records as the windiest spot in the UK. Luckily, we experienced only normal levels of wind.

An hour's drive south and we were back to our lovely Horgabost campsite, ready to enjoy some sausages and hash browns and to read a good book in the evening sun.

Next morning took us first to The Temple, not a religious building, but a café slightly down the coast. We enjoyed the tasty coffee while overlooking the salt marsh and inlet

ABOVE
Beautiful Harris

INSET
Seals chilling in the sun

BELOW
Eilean Donan Castle

of water where birds frolicked, chasing each other. The scrumptious slice of lemon and meadowsweet cake still appears in my dreams. The actual old ruins of a temple are nearby on the coast, but we had lots planned and therefore had to add this to the list of things to do when we definitely return in the future.

Second point of call was Rodel, a quaint little village and home to the historic St Clement's Church. Built by the MacLeod clan chiefs of Dunvegan and Harris as a burial site in 1520, the church has many tombstones still intact, including Alasdair MacLeod's, "one of the finest 16th century tombs in Scotland," the plaque informs.

Our tour of the island took us past the Seal Viewing Point and it did not disappoint. A small bob of seals was indeed basking on the rocks just off the coast and seemed to be enjoying the sun like the rest of us.

Seeing the seals slide into the refreshing waters made us want to dip in, too, and that is exactly what we did at the famous Luskentyre Beach. Parking there was tricky, as everyone had flocked to these award-winning sands, but I can see why it is often in the UK top 10 beaches list. The toilets did unfortunately take me back to Soviet-era Estonia, but the water was glimmering in a thousand hues of blue and the sand was white and inviting.

TOP
Gearrannan Blackhouse Village

ABOVE
The very quaint Portree on the Isle of Skye

INSET
The beautiful view from Café Arriba in Portree

Post 'sun, sea and suspicious seagulls' at Luskentyre, we freed up the parking spot and decided to eat our snacks some distance away on the banks of the tidal plane. We then continued on to Tarbert for more Harris Tweed souvenirs before heading over the bridge to Scalpay, more specifically to Eilean Glas Lighthouse.

The walk from the car park was just over a mile long, but the time spent walking (30 minutes if you are not lollygagging en route) was rewarded by amazing panning views and the most picturesque lighthouse I had ever seen. Built in 1789, it was one of the first four lighthouses established in the UK by the Northern Lighthouse Board and has a café run by a very friendly old man welcoming you with a selection of cakes and hot beverages.

We gratefully sat in the quaint café room and chatted with him, learning that the building, like the lighthouse, will soon get new sturdy (even bulletproof) glass shutters to survive the harsh winters.

We woke early next morning to pack away the awning – undoubtedly the least favourite part of any trip away – and had a quick breakfast before heading to Stornoway about an hour's drive north.

Upon arriving there, we parked up close to Lews Castle. Built in 1847, the castle now hosts a hotel and a museum, which we sadly had no time to visit, though we did enjoy a short stroll in the historic gardens.

We then walked around the centre of Stornoway, very small and unassuming, yet not without a certain charm, and headed to the ferry queue for 1pm, sandwiches and coffees from the nearby Artizan café on our laps (now Macs Café). Two hours and forty minutes of very still seas later, we arrived at Ullapool ferry port. The mainland welcomed us with imposing mountains and the sky was, again, overcast.

It was as if our time across the sea was a glimmering dream and now we

➡

were well and truly back to reality. We had enjoyed our wee break immensely and are already planning another visit for next year, this time staying for longer and also visiting the nearby Uist, St Kilda and Barra islands.

Travelling on Isle of Harris and Lewis is quite comfortable as the roads are in good condition, even though most are single track. There are a lot of cattle grids, like on the north and west coast of mainland Scotland, so if you have a weak bladder or loose fillings, things might get tricky for you.

The lunar landscapes of Harris and the more plain-looking Lewis are both covered in peat moors and littered with an abundance of small inland lakes and surprisingly average-looking houses.

There are only two supermarkets on the whole island of Lewis and Harris, but a bunch of smaller shops. We also noticed a fair few honesty boxes for knick-knacks and cakes, some complete with packaged products, worthy of any crafts shop, and individually packaged cakes. Some even took card payments or had QR codes and a camera for added security, in case the "honesty" was not adhered to.

Our adventures on Skye, Lewis and Harris, as well as a wee trip over the bridge to the Isle of Scalpay definitely left us with a thirst to discover more of what Scotland's islands have to offer. We're looking forward to those encounters in the not-too-distant future!

ABOVE
Eilean Glas lighthouse

INSET
Dolce at Luskentyre beach

BELOW
Calanais Standing stones

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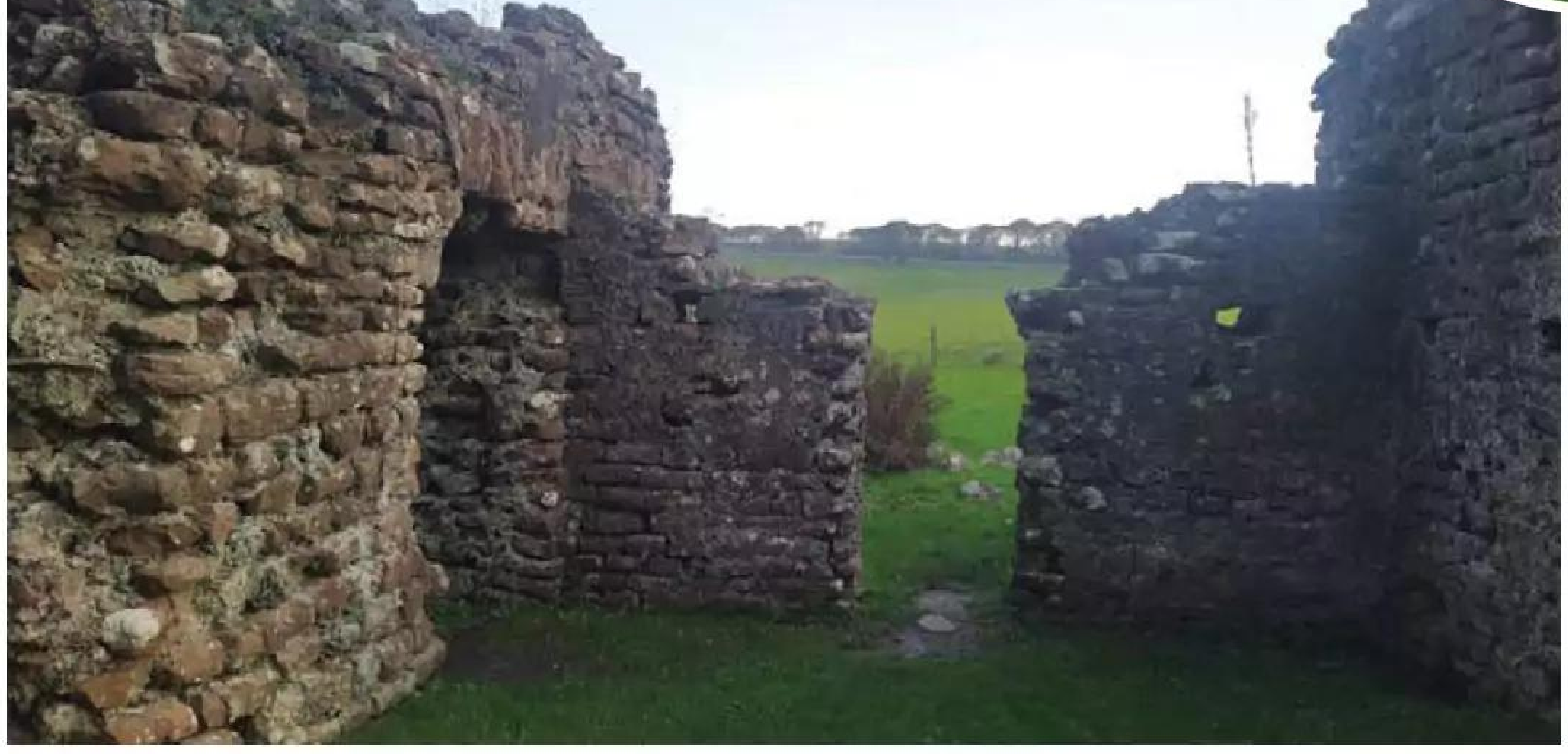
Words & pictures ▌ Sarah Warburton



We set off from our Wiltshire home full of anticipation. Our destination was Cumbria, but not as we knew it. Like many, our trips there had tended to be focused around the stunning lakes and mountains, and we had never ventured to the coast. We wanted to change this and so plotted a circular route driving up to Carlisle, then heading westwards and meandering south, towards the sea.

While the journey should have taken no more than five hours, eight hours later, with only Carlisle and Scotland remaining on the motorway signs, we left the M6 and headed to our first stop, Englethwaite Hall Caravan and Motorhome Club site. With such a slow and frustrating journey, we were glad to get some fresh air and give the dogs a walk before turning in for the night.

The following day, we drove to Lanercost Priory. Our route took us through gentle, verdant countryside where rosy sandstone cottages clustered around village greens. There was plentiful parking in the visitor centre car park and we couldn't resist a quick look around the stylish gift shop. The centre is clearly a popular meeting point for cyclists and walkers, many of whom were weighed down by giant backpacks, perhaps undertaking the 84-mile Hadrian's Wall Path which passes close by.

We were curious as to why a priory, founded centuries after the wall, built in 1169, is featured on our Hadrian's Wall Country map in the first place. We didn't have to look too far to uncover why.

Lanercost, it turns out, was built almost a literal stone's throw away from Hadrian's Wall. Building materials for the priory were pillaged from the then abandoned wall.

Today, Lanercost is a tranquil place, but that hasn't always been the case. The history of this Augustinian priory is punctuated with violence, having been ransacked multiple times during Anglo-Saxon conflicts over the years.

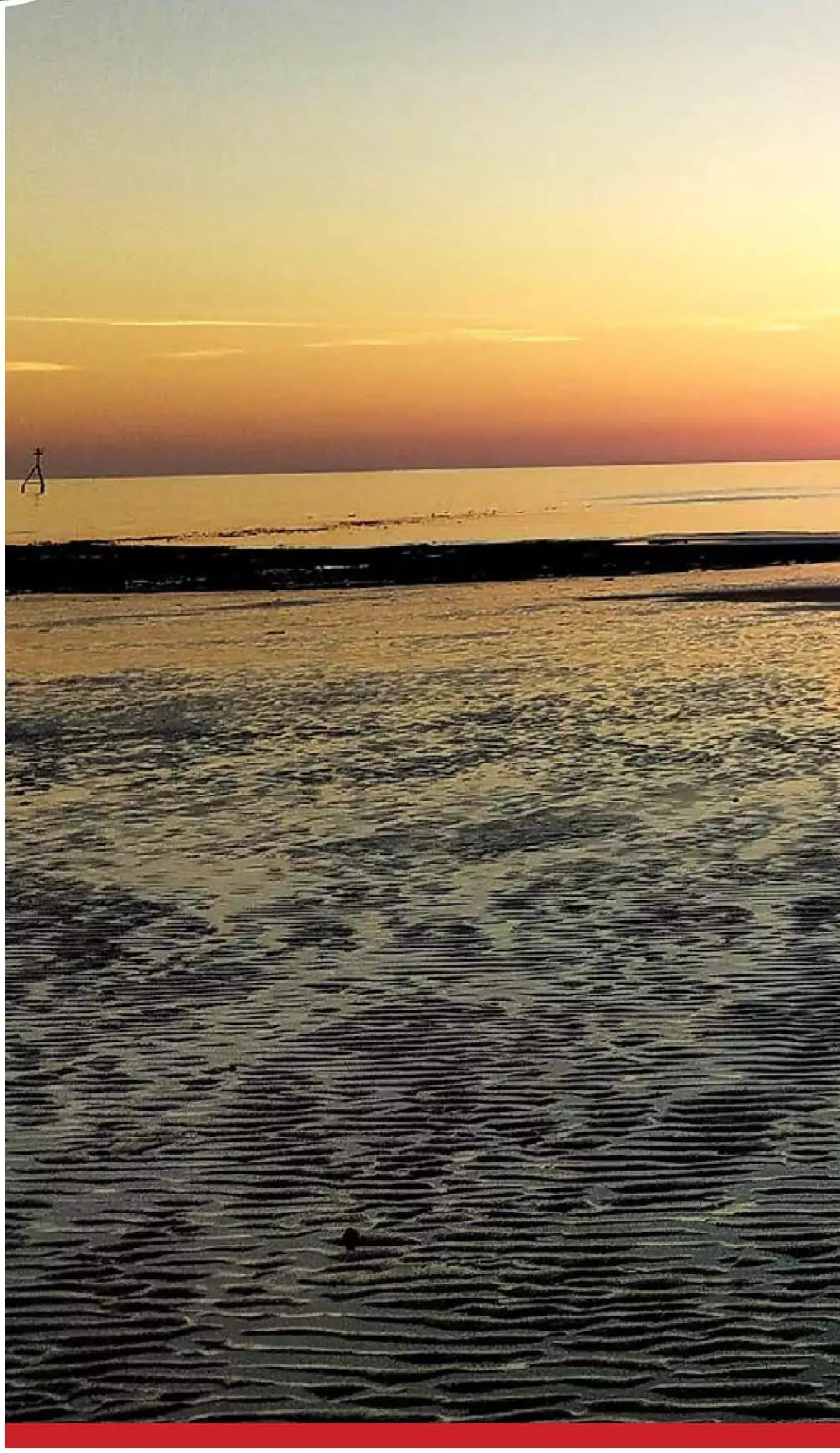
What remains is a fraction of the former monastic complex. In its day, it must have been an imposing sight with its tall sandstone walls.

Following the dissolution of the monasteries, the priory became a private house before being abandoned in the eighteenth century, but the former north aisle of the priory became the parish church and remains a place of worship to this day.

Driving back to the site, the grey

OUR 'VAN

A 2022 Elddis CV40 called Mavis. She's our first 'van and we love relaxing in the roomy lounge at the rear with the back doors wide open



TOP LEFT
Remains of the Roman Bath House in Ravenglass

INSET
Speckled wood butterfly at Ennerdale

COSTA DEL CUMBRIA

Getting a very different view of the Lakeland fells, from Cumbria's often overlooked coastline

MAIN PHOTO
Sunset at Maryport

clouds began to lift so we could get a sense of the area's geography. In one direction lay the bulk of the North Pennines, whilst in the other, seemingly rising out of nowhere, was the craggy silhouette of the Lake District fells.

That evening, we took a woodland walk through High Stand Plantation, adjacent to the site, looking in vain for the red squirrels which inhabit the surrounding area.

The following day dawned sunny and clear as we made our way across to Carlisle, before heading southwest to Maryport, catching glimpses of the shimmering water of the Solway Firth as we passed. Loving being by water as much as I do, I especially looked forward to staying at Harbour Side Caravan Site, and the setting did not disappoint. As we pitched up to the soundtrack of clanking boat masts and squawking gulls, there was a definite Costa del Cumbria vibe.

Our surroundings consisted primarily of fellow campers sat outside, vino in hand, making the most of the northwest sunshine. From our pitch we could see not only

➡

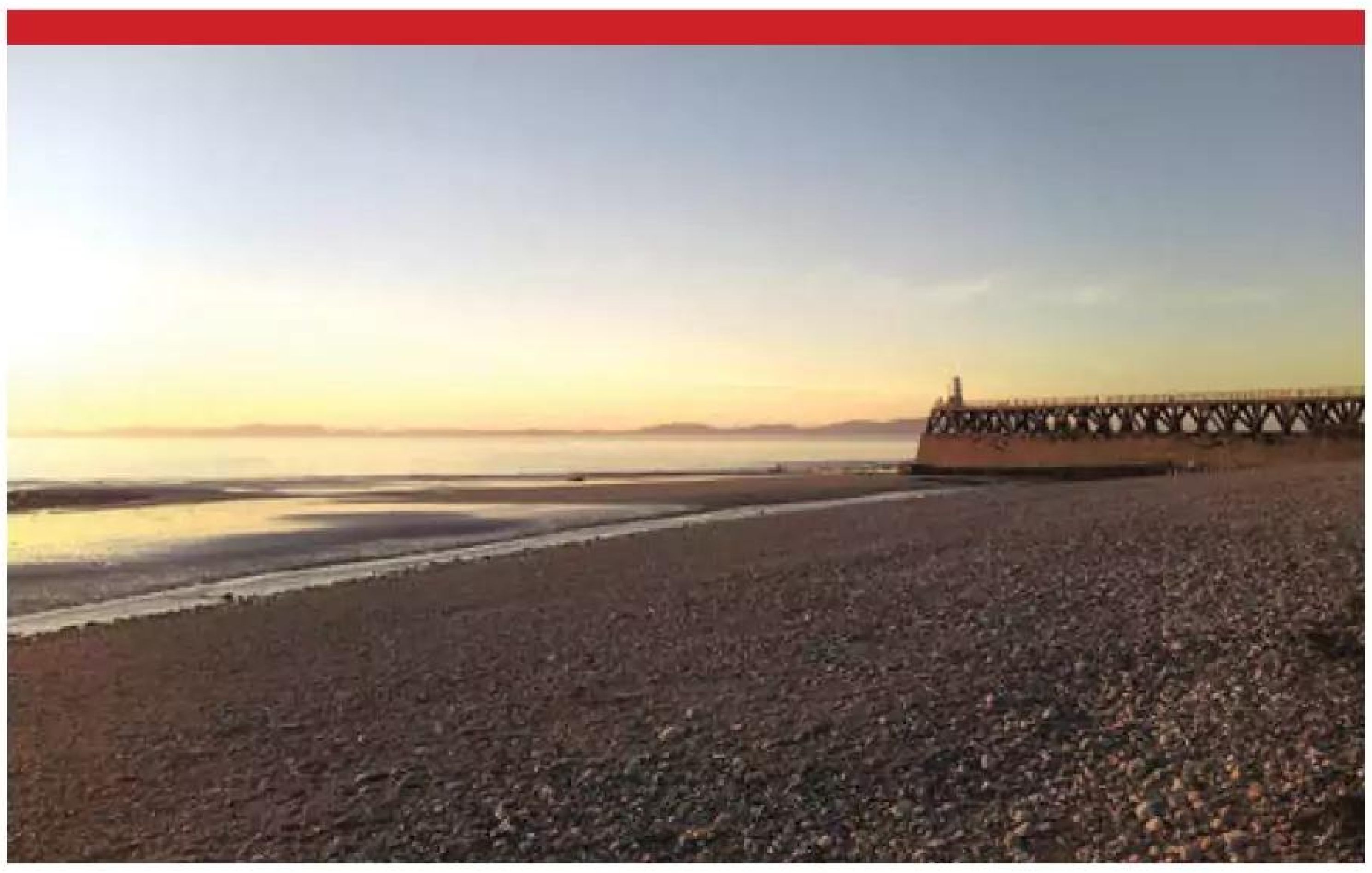
OUR ROUTE TOOK US THROUGH GENTLE, VERDANT COUNTRYSIDE WHERE ROSY SANDSTONE COTTAGES CLUSTERED AROUND VILLAGE GREENS

ABOVE CLOCKWISE
Andrew following the England Coast Path along the estuary at Ravenglass

Senhouse Roman Museum, Maryport

Georgian houses, Fleming Square, Maryport

BELOW
Sunset at Maryport



the boats in the marina, but past Maryport's lighthouse and right over the Solway Firth to Scotland. It was glorious!

As afternoon nudged into evening, we took a stroll around the harbour to Elizabeth Dock, still home to a small fishing fleet, and then to Maryport Beach to catch a sunset. Perching on rocks, we watched the fading peachy, rosy colours in the sky as the sun retreated over the horizon – a beautiful end to the day.

Up early, we strolled to the Senhouse Roman Museum, housed in a former Victorian naval training battery, perched atop Maryport's cliffs. As dogs weren't allowed inside, we tag-teamed; I spent some time reading about Maryport's Roman history whilst Andrew headed into the museum. Next to the museum was the site of a Roman fort, known as Alauna, which was part of a chain that formed a coastal defence system stretching from Hadrian's Wall and along the Solway Firth.

The museum itself boasts the largest collection of Roman altars and inscriptions from a single site in Britain. It was quite mind-blowing seeing these ancient artefacts that are still so intact and detailed.

We then followed the town's heritage trail. Founded by Humphrey Senhouse, a local landowner in 1749, it was originally a small harbour called Ellenfoot. The new town and port was named Maryport after Senhouse's wife.

A successful iron foundry and shipyard means that Maryport was thriving; the elegant Fleming Square, lined with Georgian villas, gives a nod to the town's prosperous past. We stopped off at Her Citi Café and sat in a garden that wouldn't have looked out of place in the Mediterranean, before wandering around the harbour and back to the 'van.

Another day of bright sunshine dawned as we left Maryport behind. Ever since reading about the Wild Ennerdale Rewilding Project, I've been keen to visit.

Approaching the lake, we had a peek of shimmering waters as the lanes became narrower and more twisty. We were glad that Mavis wasn't any bigger as we nimbly

FIND OUT MORE

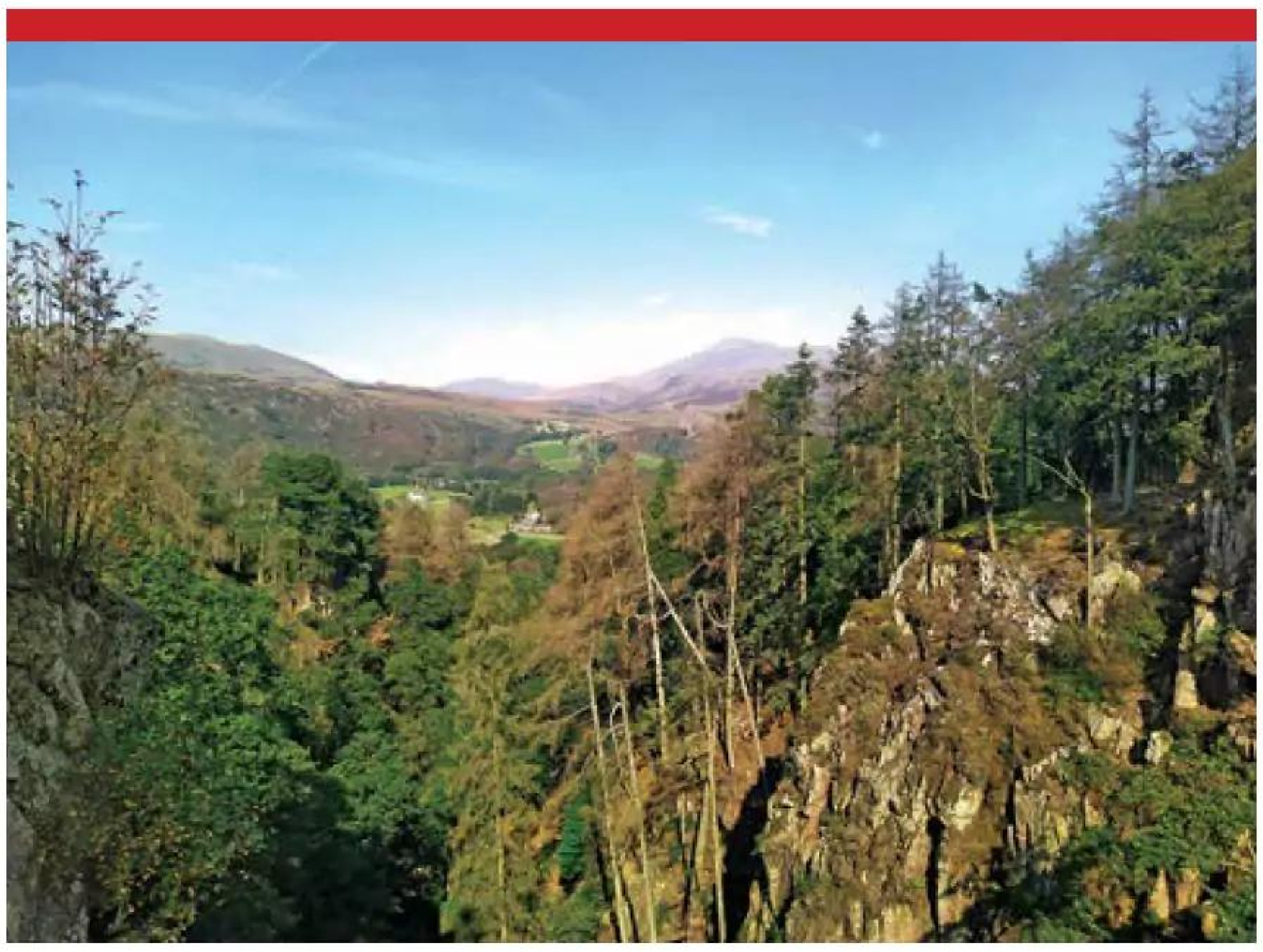
● Lanercost Priory is managed by English Heritage, so is free for members as well as those with Cadw and Historic Scotland memberships. The adjoining Priory Church of St Mary Magdalene can be visited independently of the priory
W english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/lanercost-priory

● An informative leaflet, The Maryport Heritage Trail, can be collected free of charge from various outlets around the town. For info about Maryport
W visitallerdale.co.uk/maryport

● The Senhouse Roman Museum is open year-round, but opening hours vary depending on the season
W senhousemuseum.co.uk

● Maryport is also the home of the Lake District Coast Aquarium W maryportaquarium.co.uk and the Maryport Maritime Museum
W maryportmaritime museum.com

ROME 1147
SS 29
BOWNESS ON SOLWAY 29
WALLSEND 110



TOP CLOCKWISE
Museum – signpost to Roman sites

Pretty cottages line the Main Street in Ravenglass

Smithy Beck waterfall, Ennerdale

ABOVE LEFT
Looking down the ravine from Stanley Ghyll Force, Eskdale

tucked into a passing place to allow a forestry truck to pass.

After parking up at Bowness Knott car park, we decided to follow the short, waymarked Smithy Beck trail and set off along the lakeside, stopping for a while to absorb the jagged mountain scenery, as glistening water gently lapped at the shore. We branched off from the lake into an area of wilder vegetation and I don't ever recall seeing as many butterflies flitting around or basking in the sun as we did there.

We continued into a wooded area and found Smithy Beck waterfall, cascading over grey boulders. From an information board, we learned about the Japanese word komorebi which refers to the joy of dappled sunlight coming through leaves. And as we stood there admiring the scene, it seemed an apt notion for such a perfect day.

Ravenglass was our home for the next couple of days and, on our first morning, we took a five-minute walk from the site for another encounter with Roman history. The remains of a Roman bath house, with surprisingly high and intact walls, still stands next to where there was once a large Roman fort.

We continued on, picking up the England Coast Path towards the village centre. During a low tide, the route directs walkers along the firm but sticky mud of the estuary, where egrets, curlews and oystercatchers were busy on the hunt for food.

The main street of Ravenglass is lined with colourful, characterful cottages and it was easy to imagine the hive of activity that the village must have been during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when it was Cumberland's busiest port.

Afternoon saw us visit the railway museum, which tells the story of the Ravenglass and Eskdale line, or 'La'al Ratty' as it's known locally. Opened in 1875, this narrow-gauge railway began life transporting iron ore from the mines high in Eskdale to the mainline railway at Ravenglass.

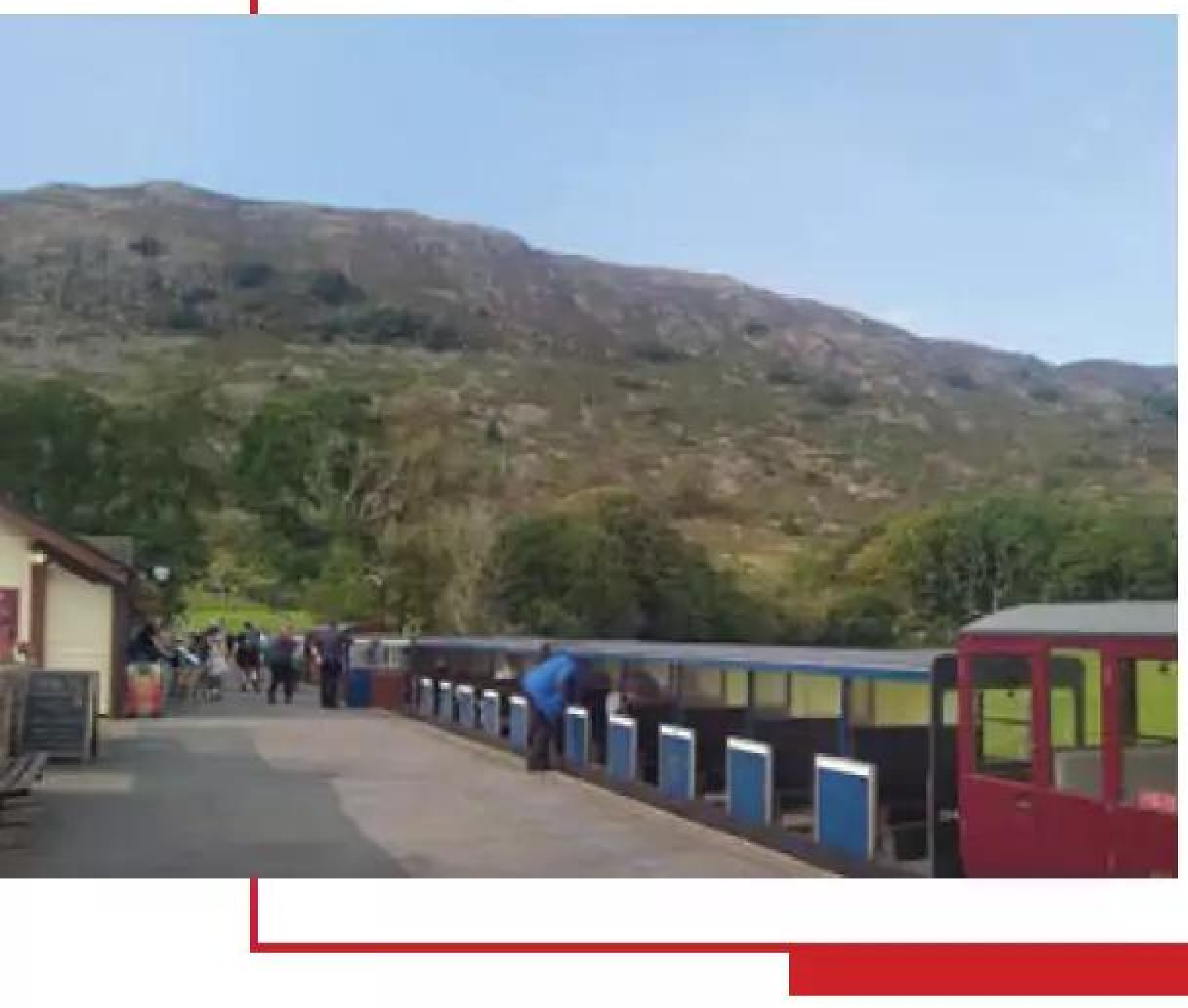
The museum documents the line's history, including how it was saved from extinction in 1960 by a local group of railway enthusiasts. Meanwhile, a special exhibition inspired by Alfred Wainwright's book, *Walks from Ratty*, whetted our appetite for some of the scenery we could expect from our trip on the train the following day.

For 40 minutes, covering seven miles, the little locomotive, Whillan Beck, chugged and heaved its carriages upwards, taking us through fields and woodland before a spellbinding mountain panorama unfolded around us. We left the train at Dalegarth for Boot station, picked up some supplies ä from the café and enjoyed a picnic sat by the River Esk, before embarking on a walk we'd chosen from *Walks from Ratty* to Dalegarth Falls (also known as Stanley Ghyll Force).

Following a stony path took us through a woodland wonderland alongside a tinkling, twinkling stream that tumbled over grey boulders. The path became steeper as we headed up the gorge before arriving at the viewing platform from where we could see Stanley Ghyll Force, an 18m

✔ TOP TIP

Eskdale Railway trains run from March until November, as well as during school holidays. Upgrades to first class and observation carriages are available and there are also various specials throughout the year, such as fish and chip trains



foamy cascade, plummeting down the ravine.

Wainwright called this 'Lakeland's loveliest waterfall' and we didn't feel that we could argue with that. What the walk lacked in distance (it was only two miles there and back), it made up for in terms of views, and will live long in the memory.

Reluctantly leaving Ravenglass behind, we drove further down the coast to the village of Silecroft. The tide was out and expansive is an understatement to describe this enormous beach.

The dogs enjoyed tearing around until they were on the brink of exhaustion, while we meandered along enjoying a spot of beachcombing and watching a group of riders and their horses galloping along, manes and tails flowing majestically behind.

Before hitting the road again, we had lunch in the lovely beach café and were lucky enough to bag a table by the window, where we sat watching the tide come in whilst devouring enormous chocolate sticky buns.

Then it was off to Millom, where we were booked in for a night at Estuary View Escapes, located on the town's old pier alongside the Duddon Estuary. Stepping out of the 'van, the view was incredible and the photos really don't do it justice.

The golden sands of the estuary, scattered with various seabirds, were framed by a mountain panorama that read like a who's who of Lakeland fells with Fairfield, High Street, Scafell Pike and the Old Man of Coniston amongst those visible.

After taking the short walk along the estuary to Millom Beach, I was happy to settle in with a brew and my binoculars and make the most of the views, the birds and the mesmerising swirls of the incoming tide.

The next morning, we wound our way around the Duddon Estuary towards Barrow, where we did a supermarket shop before taking the coast road to Ulverston. We passed through pretty coastal villages with sweeping views across Morecambe Bay before parking up at Bardsea Country Park.

We were unable to resist sampling the wares from Roy's ice cream van, and I was very glad we did because the Kendal mint cake ice cream was utterly divine. As we sat looking out over the water and enjoying our ice creams, a weasel popped out of the undergrowth to peer at us!

For our penultimate day's final stop, we decided to follow a suggested walk from a leaflet we'd picked up at the site reception. The route took us towards the coast where we walked along the shingle beach. Again, it was low tide, and there were plenty of seabirds, including a large flock of redshanks and several curlews with their haunting calls carrying across the sands.

LEFT
Dalegarth for Boot Station on the Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway

ABOVE
Lanercost Parish Church

BELOW
Market Street in Ulverston

BELOW LEFT
View from Estuary View Escapes

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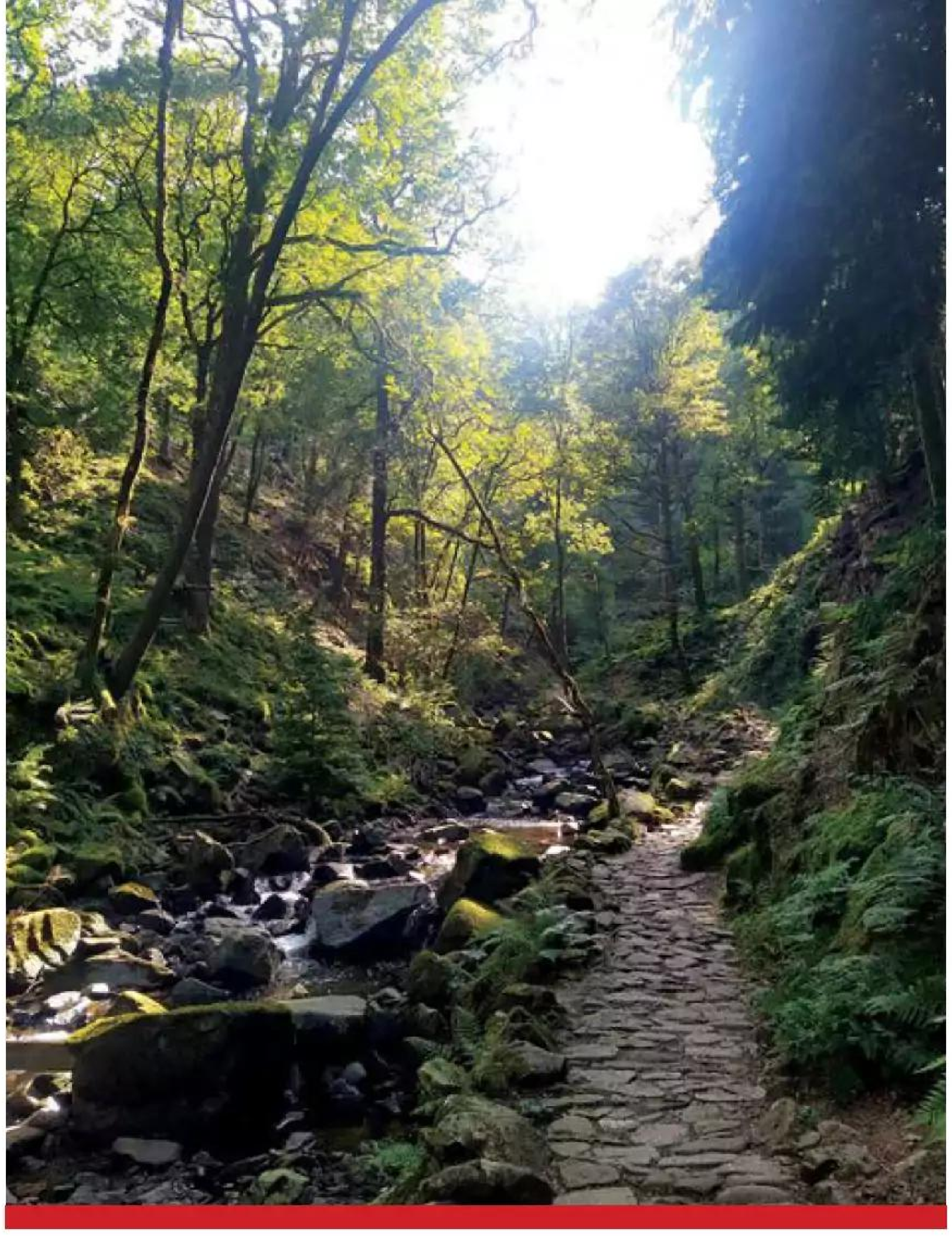


Leaving the coast behind, we arrived at Conishead Priory. This Victorian Gothic mansion, sitting cheek by jowl with a Buddhist temple, has an interesting story that's told in a small indoor exhibition.

The original priory dated from 1160 and has been rebuilt twice. The building has served as a hydropathic hotel, a miners' convalescent home and the largest WWII military hospital in the northwest, before falling into disrepair and finally being saved by a Buddhist community in 1970. The site is open to the public and was abuzz with visitors as we enjoyed a brew and toasted teacake in the café, before ambling back to the 'van just as the heavens opened.

As our final day was accompanied by a yellow weather warning, we donned waterproofs and walked the mile into Ulverston with the intent of immersing ourselves in all things Laurel and Hardy at the museum dedicated to the town's most famous son, Stan Laurel.

For the next couple of hours, we learned all about Stan's life and his road to stardom before settling into the museum's mini cinema, showing original Laurel and Hardy films on a loop. I'm slightly embarrassed to admit that I'd only ever seen the cartoons before, but slapstick humour never gets old, as proved by the regular outbursts of laughter from an appreciative audience.

With no sign of a downpour ending, we hotfooted it around the corner onto Market Street and installed ourselves next to the open fire in Gillam's Tearoom for a delicious pie lunch. We didn't want to leave without seeing at least a little more of Ulverston, despite the persistent rain, and so we wandered along the cobbled streets, admiring the brightly coloured shopfronts.

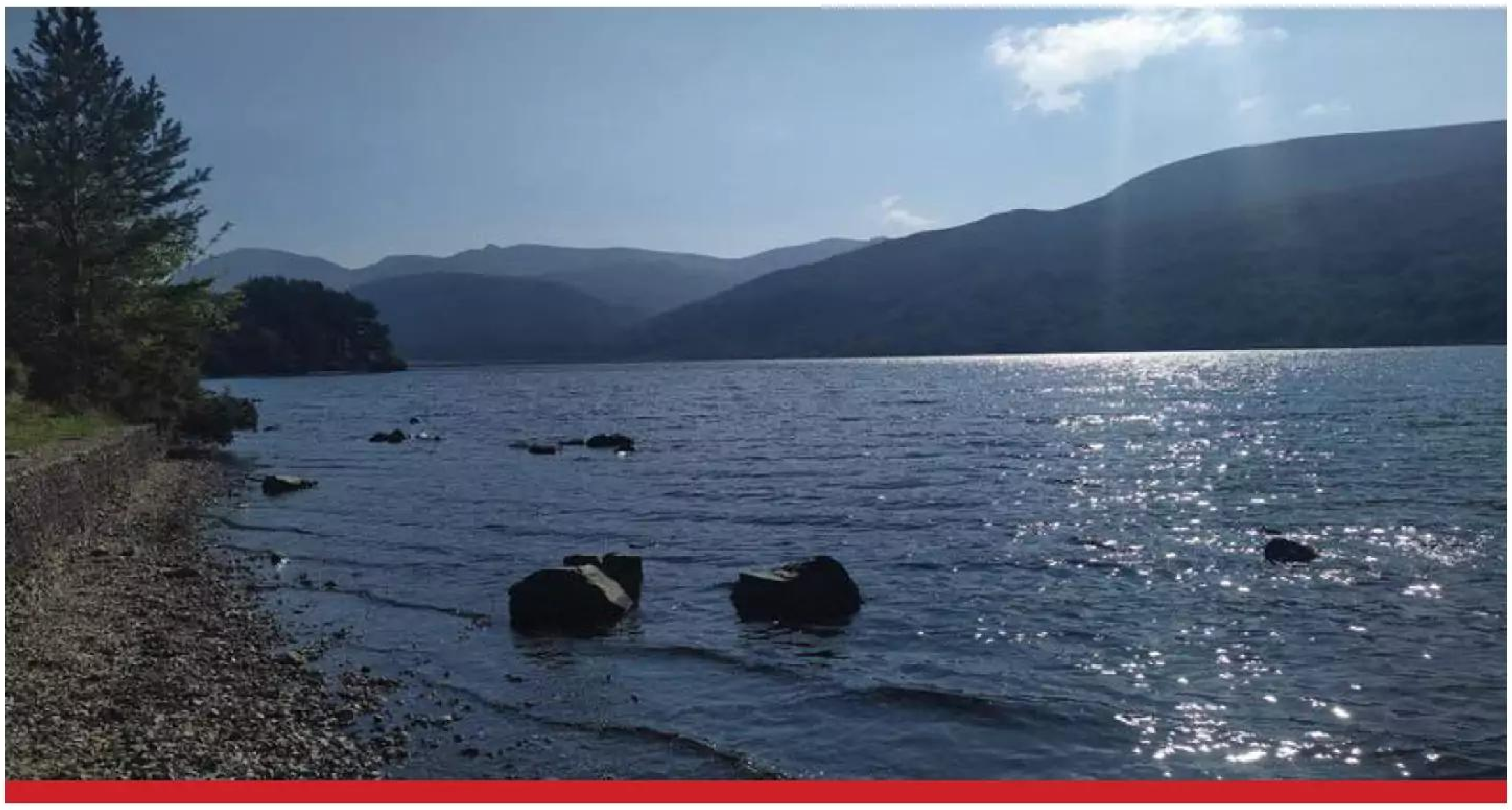
We then mooched around the indoor market, picking up some food-related items. By then, we were drenched and the pooches were looking decidedly sorry for themselves and so it was back to the 'van to dry out.

We'd thoroughly enjoyed our pootle along the Cumbrian coast, seeing a different side to the county that's inextricably linked to the Lakes. And as always, we'd come away with lots of ideas for yet more places we want to visit.

ABOVE
The path to Dalegarth Force, Eskdale

BELOW
Fishing boats in Maryport

BOTTOM
A perfect scene at Ennerdale



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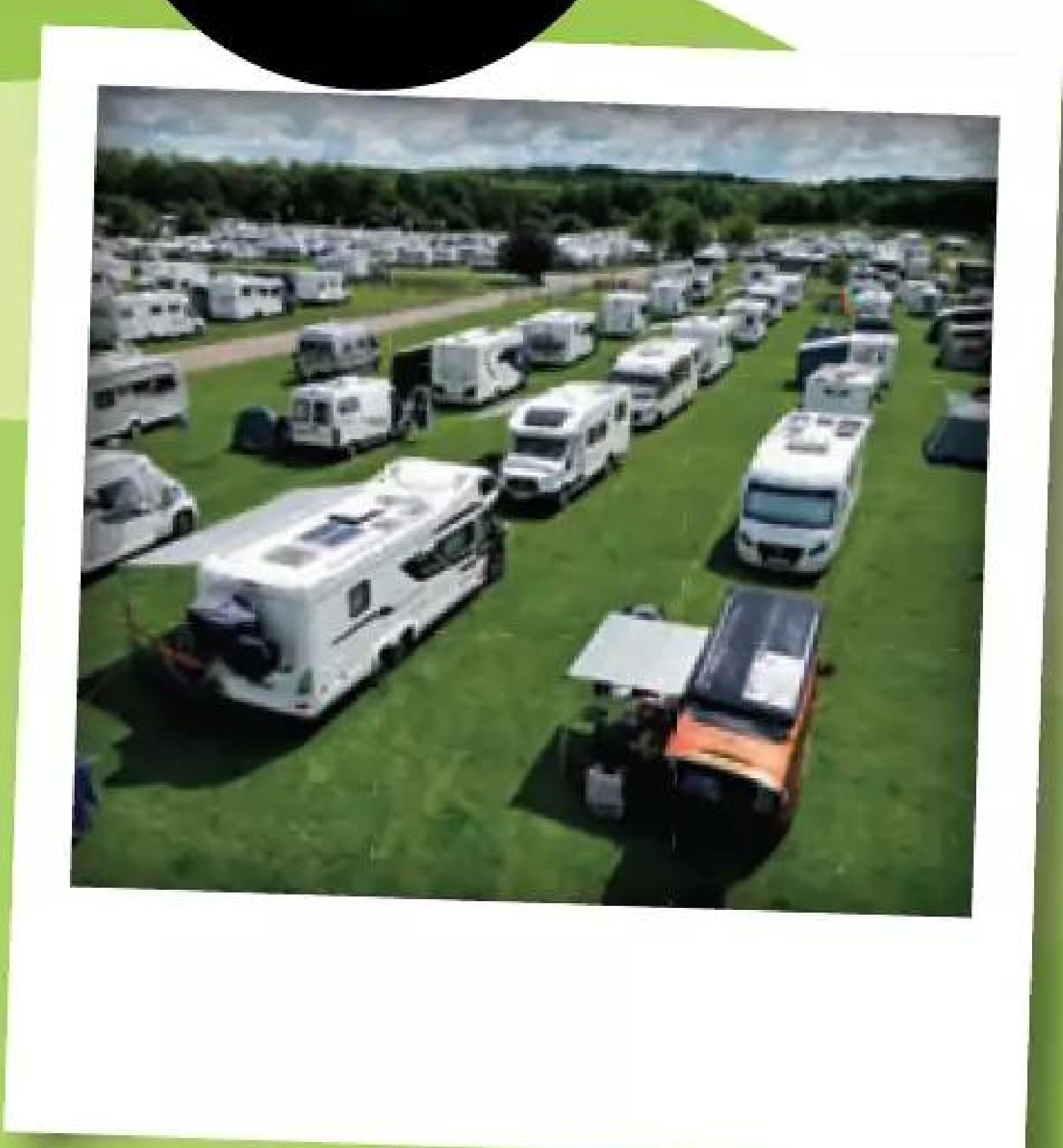

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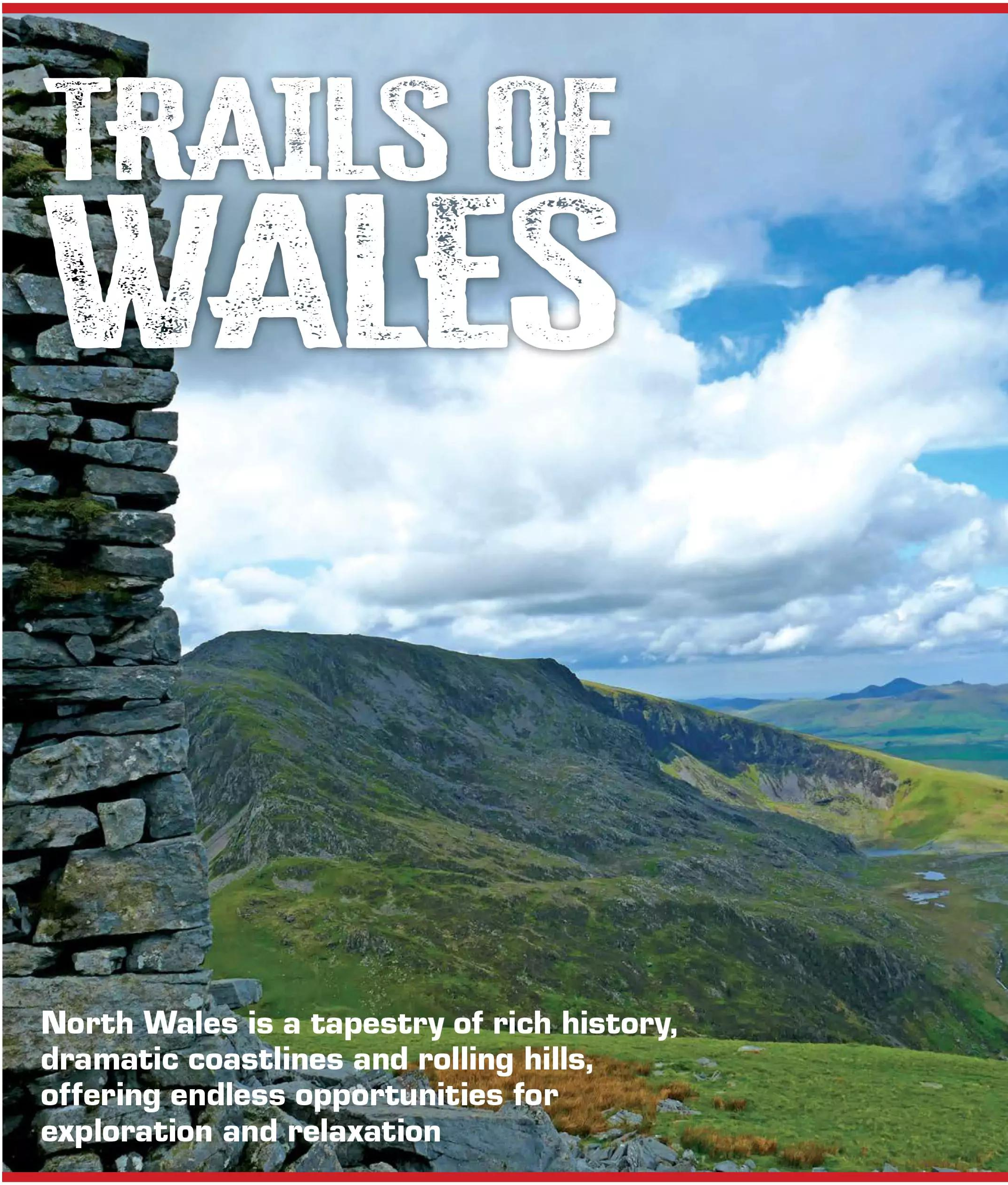


TRAILS OF WALES

North Wales is a tapestry of rich history, dramatic coastlines and rolling hills, offering endless opportunities for exploration and relaxation

ROAD TRIPS NORTH WALES

Words & Pictures | Carol Kubicki

North Wales has it all. Beaches for those who yearn for sand between their toes; castles galore for history buffs; industrial heritage for cultural aficionados; mountains, delicious food and a tempting network of lowland long-distance footpaths, perfect for those of us looking for day walks from campsites.

Peering at our maps while planning our next trip, we traced stretches of the North Wales Pilgrim's Way (Taith Pererin Gogledd Cymru), the Wales Coast Path and the Snowdonia Slate Trail (Llwybr Llechi Eryri) with our fingers.

The Pilgrim's Way crosses north Wales to Bardsey Island, off the Llyn Peninsula, an island pilgrims have been drawn to for centuries. In its 135 miles, the trail visits many significant sites and an unmissable highlight near Conwy is the climb to the remote and ruggedly simple Llangelynin Old Church. The walled church, dedicated to Saint Celynnin, has a well whose waters were once thought to be healing, tucked in the corner of the churchyard. We approached the twelfth century church from Rowen in the heavy footsteps of many coffin bearers, following the old coffin route.

The panoramas from the church will be enough for many but we continued, leaving the Pilgrim's Way and crossing grassy hills that are home to a group of wild ponies, to find the remains of Caer Bach fort and the summit of Tal y Fan. Ravens kept us company over the hill, soaring overhead as we negotiated the boulder-strewn descent.

The seemingly empty southeast-facing slopes of Tal y Fan saw plenty of activity in the past and are dotted with chambered tombs, standing stones and hut circles. We stopped to admire Maen y Bardd (Poet Stone), a well-preserved Neolithic chambered tomb, which has been placed to make the most of the view.

THE TRAILS

- **Snowdonia Slate Trail** is 83 miles long. Starting and ending in Bangor **W snowdoniaslatetrail.org**
- Wales Coast Path is 870 miles around the coast **W walescoastpath.gov.uk**
- North Wales Pilgrim's Way is a 135-mile-long marked walking route, between Basingwerk Abbey near Holywell and Bardsey Island

MAIN PICTURE The summit of Mynydd Tal-y-Mignedd

TOP LEFT Watching the trains in Blaenau Ffestiniog

TOP RIGHT The Iron Man on Llanbedrog headland

INSET Ponies above the Conwy Valley

> A fabulous view of Llanbedrog Beach with its row of colourful beach huts and the turquoise still water of Cardigan Bay

Picking up a delightful walled lane back to the campsite, thought to have been trampled by Roman Legions, the warm air released the aromas from bluebells and gorse.

Having realised it was some years since we have been to north Wales, we had planned a 10-night tour that combined old favourites and new adventures. Cefn Cae campsite near Conwy is an old favourite and, enjoying the peace and sunshine of this rural campsite, we toasted that good-to-be-back feeling.

Driving to our next site, we parked up at Trefor on the coast for a dramatic stretch of the Wales Coast Path, as well as a brief reacquaintance with the Pilgrim's Way. The terraced houses of Trefor were built for the local granite quarry workers and we parked by the sheltered beach and harbour that was once a busy shipping hub for stone. It is now used for nothing more energetic than fishing and strolling.

Heading towards the steep-sided hills that plunge into the sea here, we walked through blue spring squill and clumps of pink thrift. We spotted seabirds on the water and inland sheep kept an eye on their chunky lambs.

The beautiful Llyn Peninsula and sunny weather was a heady combination! We were staying above Abersoch and once again the coast path helped us explore.

First, we climbed the hillock by the campsite to get our bearings as this was new territory to us. The hill, topped by a disused windmill, has views that sweep over countryside and coast.

A stretch of sand led the eye to Pwllheli and on the horizon the mountains of Snowdonia shimmered blue in the evening light. Around Abersoch were a cluster of hedged fields and white houses.

The next morning we walked around the harbour to Abersoch's centre and had coffee in a lively café. This leg of the coast path took us along the curving beach with breakwaters and disparate beach huts to Machroes.

Carrying our shoes, we pushed our toes into the warm sand, the waves barely murmuring. We had lunch watching the watery comings and goings of paddleboarders, kayakers and a myriad small motorboats.

Climbing from the beach, our route wound its way above the cliffs to the headland of grassland full of wild flowers. We were enjoying the beauty of the landscape, looking across to the two islands just offshore, when we spotted dolphins. One of the boats had seen them, too, and switched off the engine, giving space to the group of about six bottlenose dolphins.

We sat on the short grass with binoculars, bowled over by the dolphins' graceful frolicking, eventually following their progress back towards Abersoch. It was a magical experience and deserved celebrating with rich Welsh ice creams before we climbed the hill to our campsite.

The following day we walked to Llanbedrog, getting a little confused in the spider's web of paths and lanes that became surreal when we found ourselves lost in a copse full of gnomes! Eventually reaching Llanbedrog, we headed for Plas Glyn-y-Weddw for much-needed

ABOVE
Looking over Llanbedrog Beach

BELOW
The Wales Coast Path near Trefor

OUR 'VAN

OUR 'VAN A 2021 Devon Firefly on a Ford Custom Transit SWB 2.0-litre. This is our third Devon Conversions campervan and we love the layout that packs so much into a sub-five-metre van

ABOVE
Blossom and bluebells in the peaceful Nantlle Valley

coffee. This art and heritage centre in a nineteenth century mansion has a lush woodland garden, outdoor sculptures and a unique café inspired by sea urchin shells.

After browsing the galleries, we explored the woodland garden, rejoining the coast path to the headland. The Iron Man, a statue that looks over Llanbedrog and the bay, stands tall on a high crag.

This is the third statue to stand here; it was designed and created locally and they say on a windy day it sings.

On a still day we didn't get to experience this eerie sound but we did have a fabulous view of Llanbedrog Beach with its row of colourful beach huts and the turquoise still water of Cardigan Bay. Walking over the headland, the rough heath was alive with insects while jet skis roared below. Back in Llanbedrog we sank a cool beer in a pub garden before heading back.

We enjoy watching the Hairy Bikers TV programmes and a old episode about north Wales had inspired us to visit a couple of places. The fascinating story of Kurmang Rashid, a former rocket scientist from Kurdistan, and the Model Bakery he ran in Blaenau Ffestiniog tempted us, along with the mouthwatering description of his spicy pasties.

Blaenau Ffestiniog was once the slate capital of Wales and so, after our delicious takeaway lunch from the bakery, we followed the signs for the Snowdonia Slate Trail. This 83-mile trail around Eryri takes walkers on a remarkable journey through the slate heritage of north Wales.

BELOW
The Llangelynin Old Church above Conwy

After leaning on the bridge watching the steam trains on the Ffestiniog Railway, we walked through oak woods and among moss-covered boulders and bluebells. While cuckoos called, our views encompassed the contrasting fissured slate-grey workings, May-fresh trees and meadows of sheep with lambs.

We had never visited the Nantlle Valley before, although the Nantlle Ridge is a well-known and challenging hill walk. We were drawn here by the Snowdonia Slate Trail and the Hairy Bikers, but what made us fall in love with this remote valley was the peaceful campsite.

The Slate Trail runs the length of the Nantlle Valley and on our first afternoon we followed it along the narrow road and across fields to a distinctive outcrop called Clogwyn y Garreg. The views opened up beyond the crag and were dominated by Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon). Walking back, the sun was setting and the light was so soft, I felt cocooned in sheep's wool.

With rain forecast for the afternoon of the next day, we set off early in the opposite direction on the Slate Trail. We were heading for Nantlle village and Poblado Coffi, a coffee roaster and café and another Hairy Bikers recommendation. A track took us around the lake to the village and we enjoyed excellent coffee in a courtyard, accompanied by tasty ginger flapjack.

✔ TOP TIPS

The road to the beach at Trefor is narrow and winding but thankfully short and most vehicles should manage it with care. There is a car park with toilets and parking by the harbour

Having lived and worked in Colombia, the owners of Poblado Coffi now collaborate with growers to provide sustainable coffee, paying a fair price to everyone along the supply chain. This is coffee that is more than fairly traded and we stuffed a couple of bags of its freshly roasted coffee into the rucksack before setting off back along the road, still hoping to beat the rain.

We successfully dodged the downpour but, as we reached our Silver Machine, the wind was whipping up a storm. Noticing a sheep had managed to sneak its way into the camping field, we re-enacted an episode of *One Man and his Dog*, without the dog, shepherding the errant sheep back to the fields. As the rain bounced off our metal roof and the wind tried to tip us over, we relaxed in the comfort of our campervan, drinking tea and eating delicious Welsh cakes.

STAY AT

CEFN CAE CAMPING SITE,
Rowen, Conwy LL32 8YU
W campinginnorthwales.co.uk
OPEN 20 March – 10 October

TALYMIGNEDD CAMPSITE,
Nantlle, Caernarfon, Gwynedd
LL54 6BT
W talymignedd.co.uk
OPEN 1 March – 31 October

RIVERSIDE TOURING PARK
Old Church Road, Betws-y-Coed,
Gwynedd LL24 0AL
W morris-leisure.co.uk
OPEN 17 February – 3 January

YR HELYG (THE WILLOWS)
Myntho, Abersoch, Gwynedd
LL53 7RW
W the-willows-abersoch.co.uk
OPEN 22 March – 31 October

The storm had blown over the next day and we set off up the sheer valley sides from the campsite to Mynydd Tal-y-Mignedd, just one of the summits on the Nantlle Ridge.

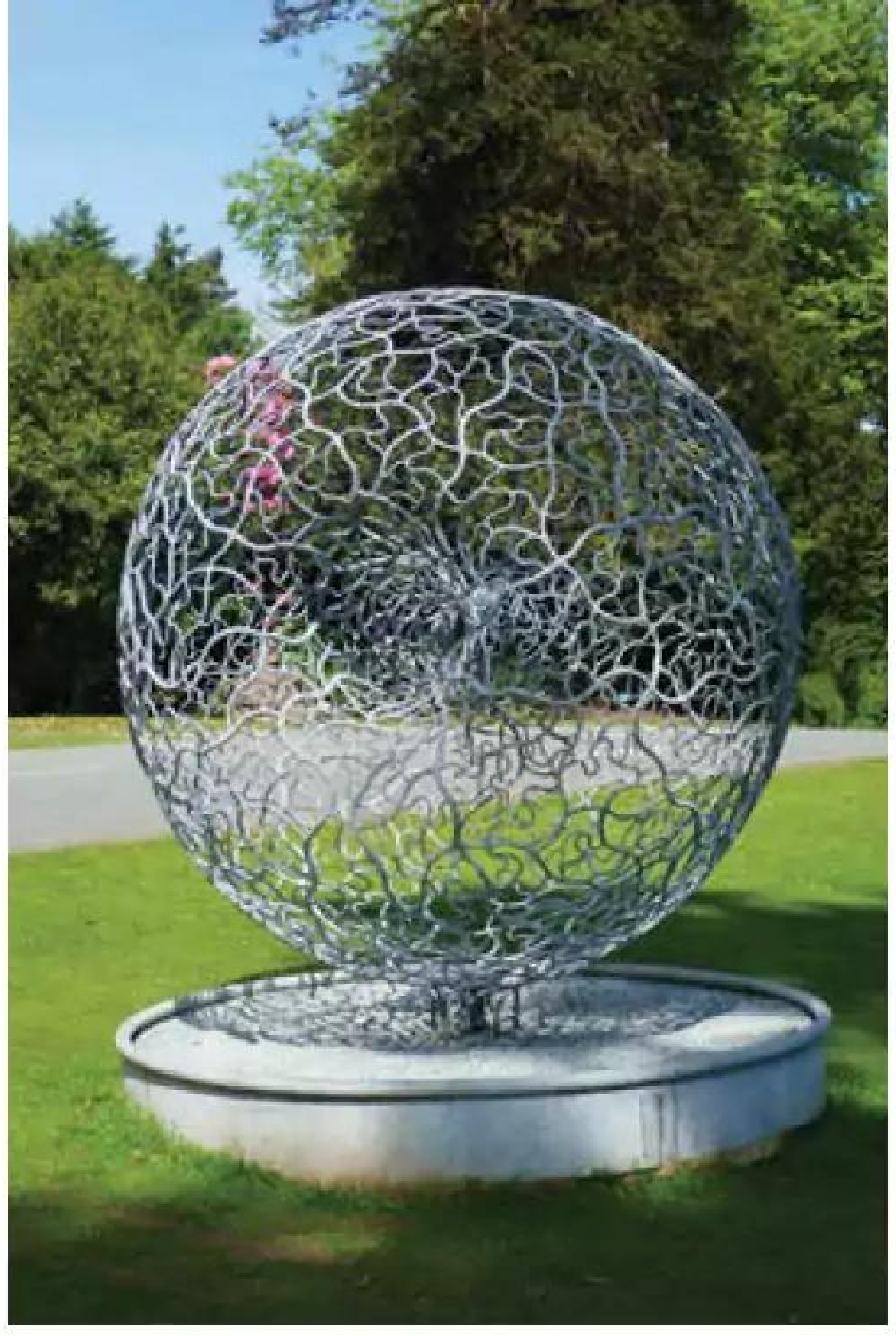
At first the track snaked through sweet-smelling bluebells, slowly opening up views along the valley. But, once we reached the open hillside, the path settled on a relentless uphill slog to the summit of grey rocks.

Fortunately, the immense views across the Nantlle Ridge to Yr Wyddfa and its surrounding mountains were worthwhile. We were grateful for the stone obelisk that gave us shelter from the stiff breeze and we had our lunch admiring the serrated edge of Craig Cwm Silyn, the highest point on the ridge. Later we descended to a narrow grassy col and peered down the precipitous slopes into the cwm, a curved mountain basin.

The bustle of Betws-y-Coed was a bit of a shock after the tranquillity of the Nantlle Valley. The railways brought the first tourists here in the nineteenth century and its scenery has drawn visitors ever since, including us for the last 40 years. Betws-y-Coed also has a mining heritage and we picked up the Slate Trail once again on a shady woodland route by the Afon Llugwy to the unusual Miners' Bridge that the quarrymen used to cross the river to work.

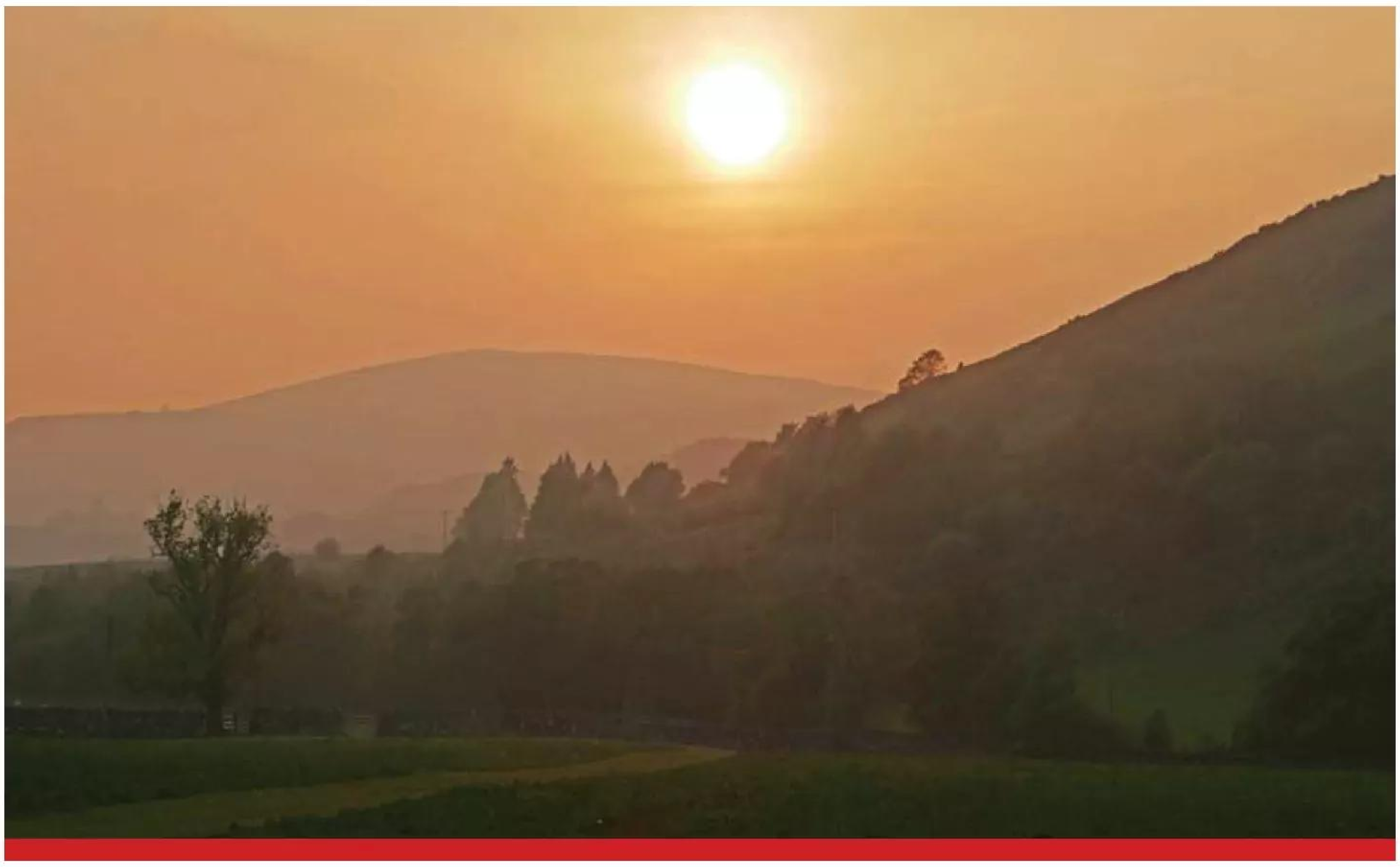
✔ TOP TIPS

If you can't manage the walk up to Llangelynin Old Church, you can drive. Information can be found at **rowenconwy.org.uk/activities/llangelynin-old-church**



TOP RIGHT
A sculpture in the gardens at Plas Glyn-y-Weddw

BELOW
A Nantlle Valley sunset



Following their footsteps, we navigated the bridge and ascended steadily to the shore of Llyn Elsi, a natural lake extended by a dam in the early twentieth century. Our lunch was spent watching the antics of Canada geese and their fluffy goslings and quieter herring gulls nesting on one of the islands.

In the evening we ate at Hangin' Pizzeria, a short walk from the campsite. This was on the recommendation of our son rather than any TV celebrities. He is a pizza connoisseur and was right to ensure we didn't miss this restaurant. With communal tables and bright colours, the pizzeria has a relaxed style and a social conscience, giving money to charities that protect orangutans, gorillas and chimps. Importantly, the pizzas were excellent!

The long-distance footpaths of north Wales had served up some fantastic walking, along with glimpses of the area's rich history. These paths are so numerous and cover such varied walking, I am sure that there will be a section which will suit everyone.

An evening of good food was the perfect way to end our tour around north Wales. We left with a cupboard full of coffee and more places to add to our favourites in this part of the UK.

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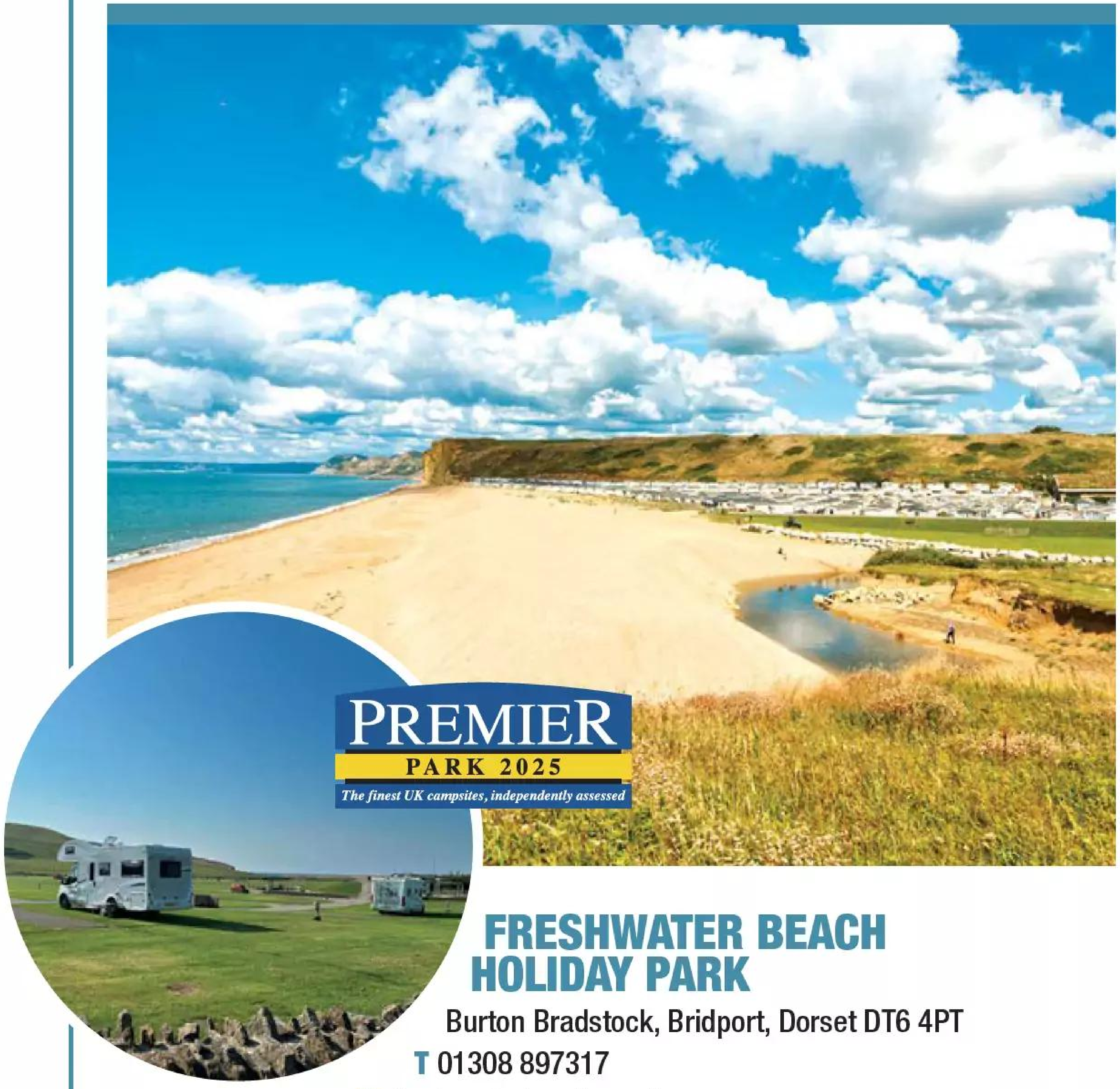
Words ▮ Claire Tupholme

ENGLAND



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FRESHWATER BEACH HOLIDAY PARK

Burton Bradstock, Bridport, Dorset DT6 4PT
T 01308 897317
W freshwaterbeach.co.uk
OPEN 14 March – 10 November

If a beach holiday is something you really enjoy then this campsite, right on the Jurassic Coast, is just the ticket. Located near West Bay, in the Dorset countryside, the vast sandy beach is literally a stone's throw from some of the touring pitches. The South West Coast Path also passes through the site so it's easy to walk in either direction and explore the coastline that this part of Dorset is so famous for – you can walk to Burton Bradstock, West Bay and beyond.

Freshwater Beach Holiday Park also has lots to offer in the way of facilities. There is an indoor and outdoor pool, a restaurant, bars, and a variety of entertainment in the main season. You can choose from grass and hardstanding pitches with electric, or fully serviced pitches. Some pitches have sea views. The site is dog friendly and an added bonus is that the beach is, too, all year round.

Peter/Pixabay

RUN COTTAGE TOURING PARK

Alderton Road, Hollesley, Woodbridge,
Suffolk IP12 3RQ
T 01394 411309 W runcottage.co.uk OPEN All year

If you're looking for a rural retreat to get away from it all and enjoy an adults-only break, this is the site! Situated close to Suffolk's heritage coast, eight miles from the pretty market town of Woodbridge, this small, adults-only, family-run site is set in a pleasant parkland setting, with flower beds and an ornate lily pond.

All pitches have electric hook-ups with some fully serviced hardstandings available. The site has a toilet and shower block, and there's a dog exercise area. A village shop and pub are half a mile away.

Run Cottage's rural location makes it ideal for walking, and for cycling the quiet Suffolk lanes. Just two miles from the site is the Suffolk and Essex Coast and Heaths National Landscape, and also Rendlesham Forest. There is a network of tracks throughout this vast woodland and heathland. The nearest beach, a mix of shingle and pebble, is just over two miles away, too.

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CASTLERIGG HALL LAKE DISTRICT CARAVAN & CAMPING PARK

Keswick, Cumbria CA12 4TE **T** 01768 774499 **W** castlerigg.co.uk **OPEN** 12 March – 31 October

Castlerigg Hall occupies an arguably envious elevated position looking out to the Lake District mountains and down to Derwentwater, set amid the Cumbrian countryside. A bus stop is 500 yards away, but it is only just over a mile to Castlerigg Stone Circle, the pretty shores of Derwentwater for walks and sailing, and the market town of Keswick where there are shops, museums, pubs and restaurants.

Pitches are hardstanding with electric or fully serviced. You can even book pitches with a guaranteed lake view. There are toilets, showers, privacy cubicles and a bathroom, along with a launderette and shop. After time spent exploring on two feet, why not rest a while in the site's Gallery, a place to enjoy a cuppa and some cake and browse local artwork and gifts. In the warmer weather you can sit out on the terrace and enjoy the stunning views.

YORK NABURN LOCK CARAVAN PARK

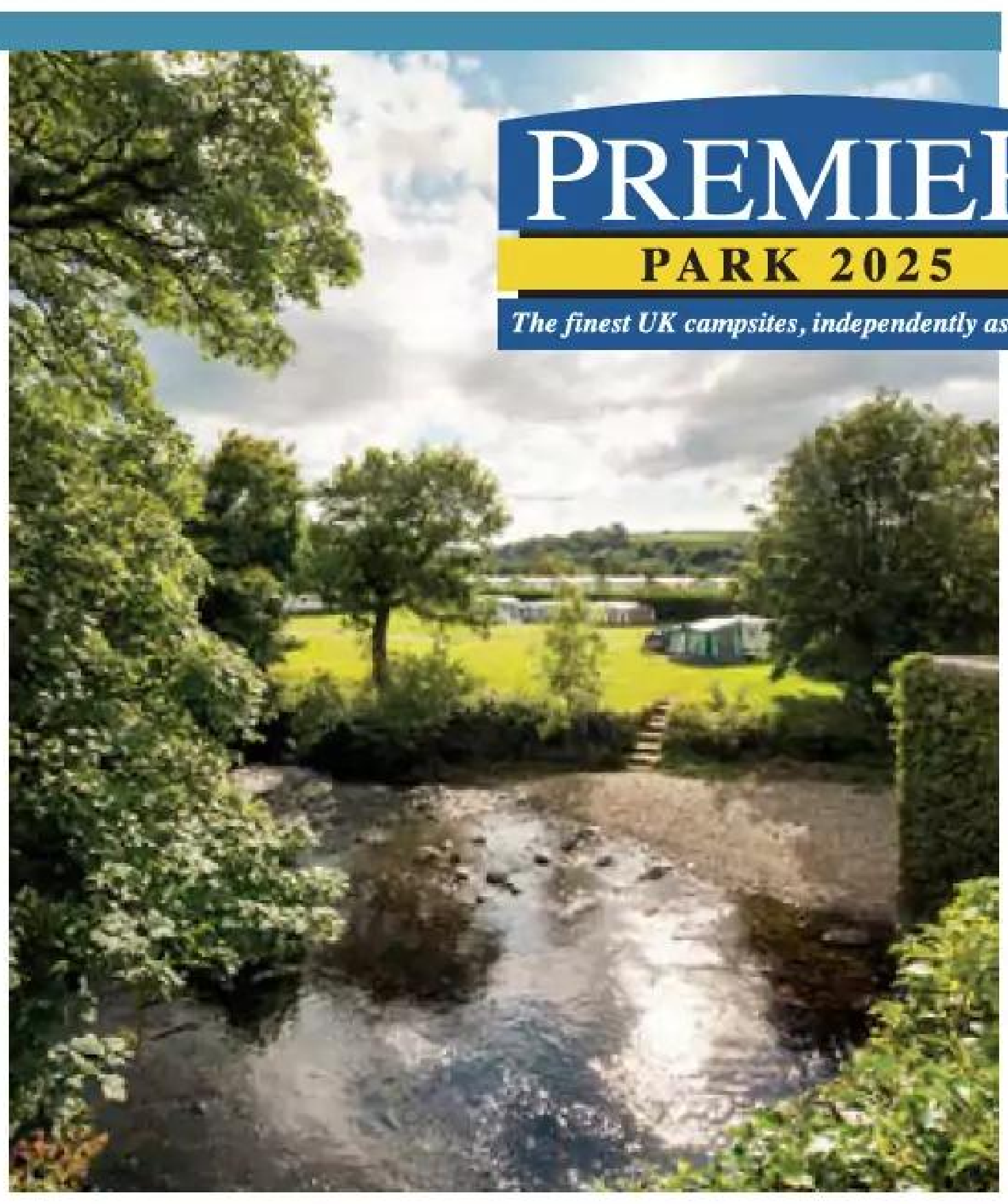
Naburn, York YO19 4RU
T 01904 728697 **W** yorknaburnlock.com
OPEN 15 March – 2 January

Richard Mooney

Featuring a brand-new facilities building for the 2025 season, and a revamped shop, York Naburn Lock Caravan Park is an adults-only site situated by the River Ouse, just four miles from York. A perfect choice for breaks to visit the historic city, but when pitched up in the landscaped grounds, you feel miles away from anywhere.

From the campsite you can enjoy walks, cycling, birdwatching and fishing. For easy access to York, you have options – a park and ride service is moments away, or a regular bus service calls at the site entrance. It's a six-mile walk or cycle into the city on mostly traffic-free routes. For a unique way to get into York, take the river bus from Naburn Lock. It runs on select days between March and September.

The site has grass and hardstanding pitches with electric, or fully serviced pitches, with the extra-large ones having a picnic table, too. Other facilities include a launderette, washing-up area, and motorhome service point.



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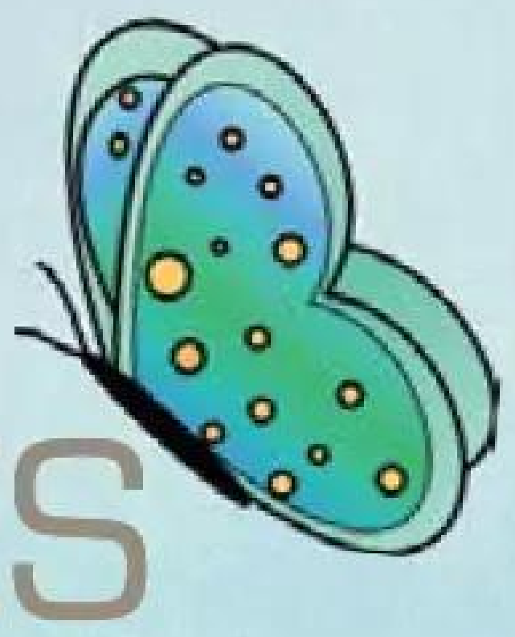
HARFORD BRIDGE HOLIDAY PARK

Peter Tavy, Tavistock, Devon PL19 9LS
T 01822 810349 **W** harfordbridge.co.uk **OPEN** 15 March – 14 November

One of the first National Parks to be designated in Britain, and the size of about 18,000 football pitches, Dartmoor is one of the UK's gems. Harford Bridge is located near the village of Peter Tavy on the western edge of the National Park. The site is only two miles from the heritage town of Tavistock, which hosts independent shops, a pannier market, and a selection of places to eat. A bus stop is less than half a mile from the site, giving access to attractions such as the National Trust's Lydford Gorge, 30 minutes away. This river gorge is the deepest one in southwest England and is home to a 30m-high waterfall. Also here is a viewing platform, bird hide, tea room and secondhand bookshop (all seasonal).

Some pitches at Harford Bridge are beside the River Tavy, and there are grass or hardstandings with electric. Facilities comprise toilets and showers, a laundry room, a four-acre dog exercise area, a games toom, tennis court and a motorhome waste point.



ROAD TRIPS CAMPSITES

NORTHERN IRELAND

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BALLYNESS CARAVAN PARK

40 Castlecat Road, Bushmills,
Co Antrim BT57 8TN
T 028 2073 2393 **W** ballynesscaravanpark.com
OPEN 14 March – 2 November

Some of the great and famous attractions of the north Antrim coast in Northern Ireland include the Giant's Causeway, the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge and the dramatic ruins of Dunluce Castle. From Ballyness Caravan Park you have access to all three, with the furthest being only 10 miles away. The beach is also just over two miles away and during the spring and summer the Causeway Rambler bus stops at the site, meaning you can explore this stunning coastline without moving your campervan.

Ballyness is an award-winning site with 50 fully serviced hardstanding pitches. There is a central amenities block with showers, accessible facilities, a family bathroom, a laundry room and dishwashing area, and a motorhome service point. For little ones in tow there is a play area and indoor games room.

There are three wildlife ponds on site and an eight-acre dog-friendly walk where 5,000 trees have been planted.

SCOTLAND

BUNROY PARK

Roy Bridge, Fort William PH31 4AG
T 01397 712332
W bunroypark.co.uk
OPEN 28 March – 31 October

Often described as the 'outdoor capital of the UK', bustling Fort William is an outdoor enthusiast's dream. From shops selling all manner of outdoor gear, to access to paths to conquer the grand heights of Ben Nevis, it's all here. Just outside Fort William is the Nevis Range Mountain Resort, a venue for snow sports, mountain biking, walking and also for accessing the mountain gondola to take a cable car to the top of Scotland's highest mountain.

Bunroy Park may be 13 miles from Fort William but it is only a quarter of a mile to the train station to easily access the town and other local attractions such as Inverness. Immediately surrounding the site is the River Spean, plus woodland, countryside and hills – a walker's dream. There are hardstanding pitches with electric hook-up, toilets, showers, a laundry room, and dogs are welcome.

SCOTLAND

ELIE HOLIDAY PARK

Shell Bay, Elie, Fife KY9 1HB **T** 01333 330283 **W** abbeyford.com **OPEN** 14 March – 30 October

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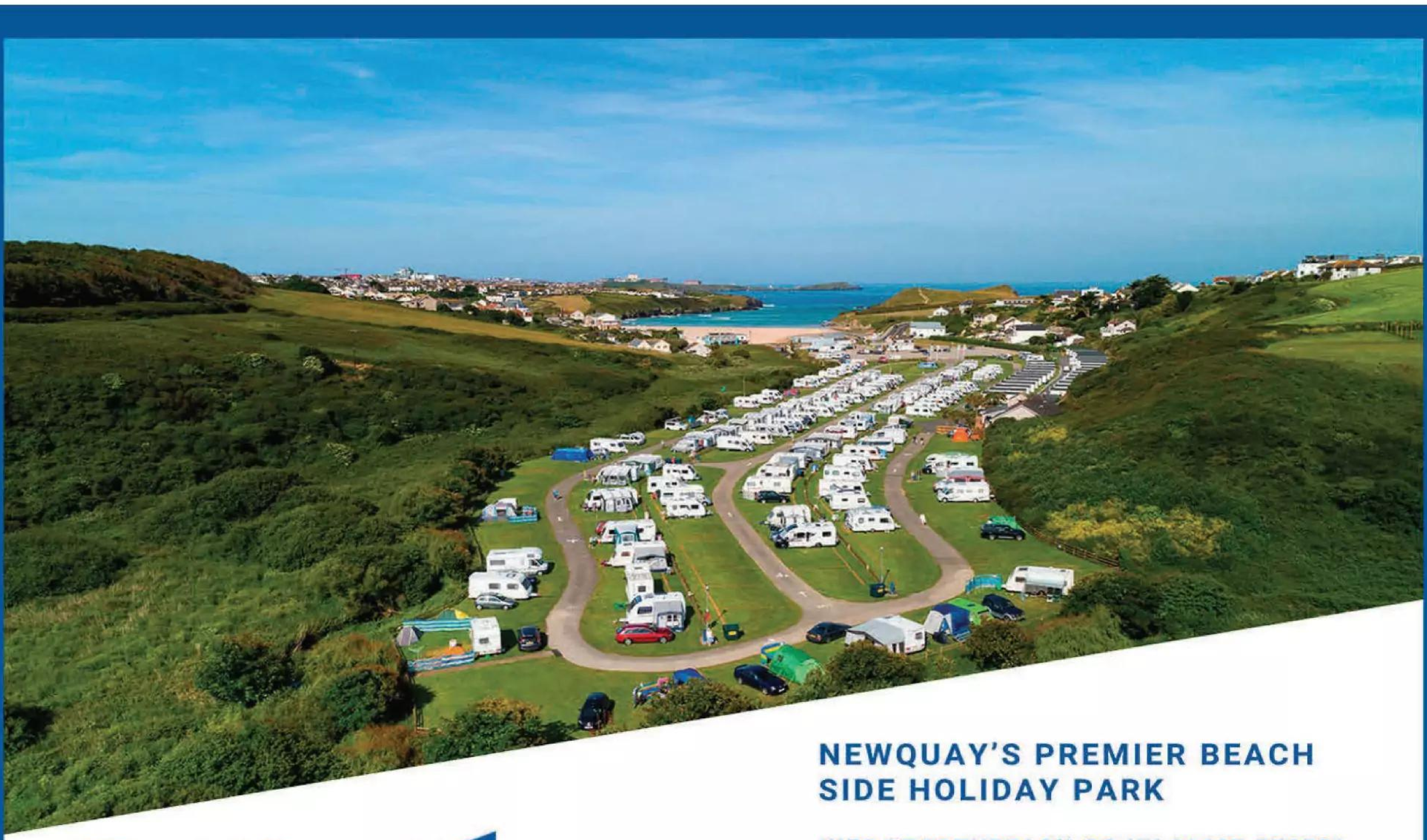
Elie Holiday Park's appeal is its location, nestled behind a wide expanse of dunes and a sweeping sandy beach, and only 30 minutes from St Andrews – Scotland's home of golf. Elie has plenty to offer whether travelling as a couple or with little ones in tow. You can walk the coastal path, go rock-pooling, explore the picturesque fishing villages nearby and enjoy a walk at Ruddons Points, a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The holiday park has a Robinson Crusoe-themed play area, entertainment, a games room, restaurant, bar, café and takeaway.

Pitches on site are hardstanding with grass between them, all with electric hook-up. There are toilets, showers, a laundry room, and up to three dogs per pitch are welcome.

Not just for golfers, nearby St Andrews is known for its cathedral ruins on the spectacular coastline, and its medieval streets.

CORNWALL



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SCOTLAND

SANDS OF LUCE HOLIDAY PARK

Sandhead, Stranraer DG9 9JR
T 01776 830456
W sandsofluceholidaypark.co.uk
OPEN 1 March –31 October

Rodney Hutchinson/Shutterstock

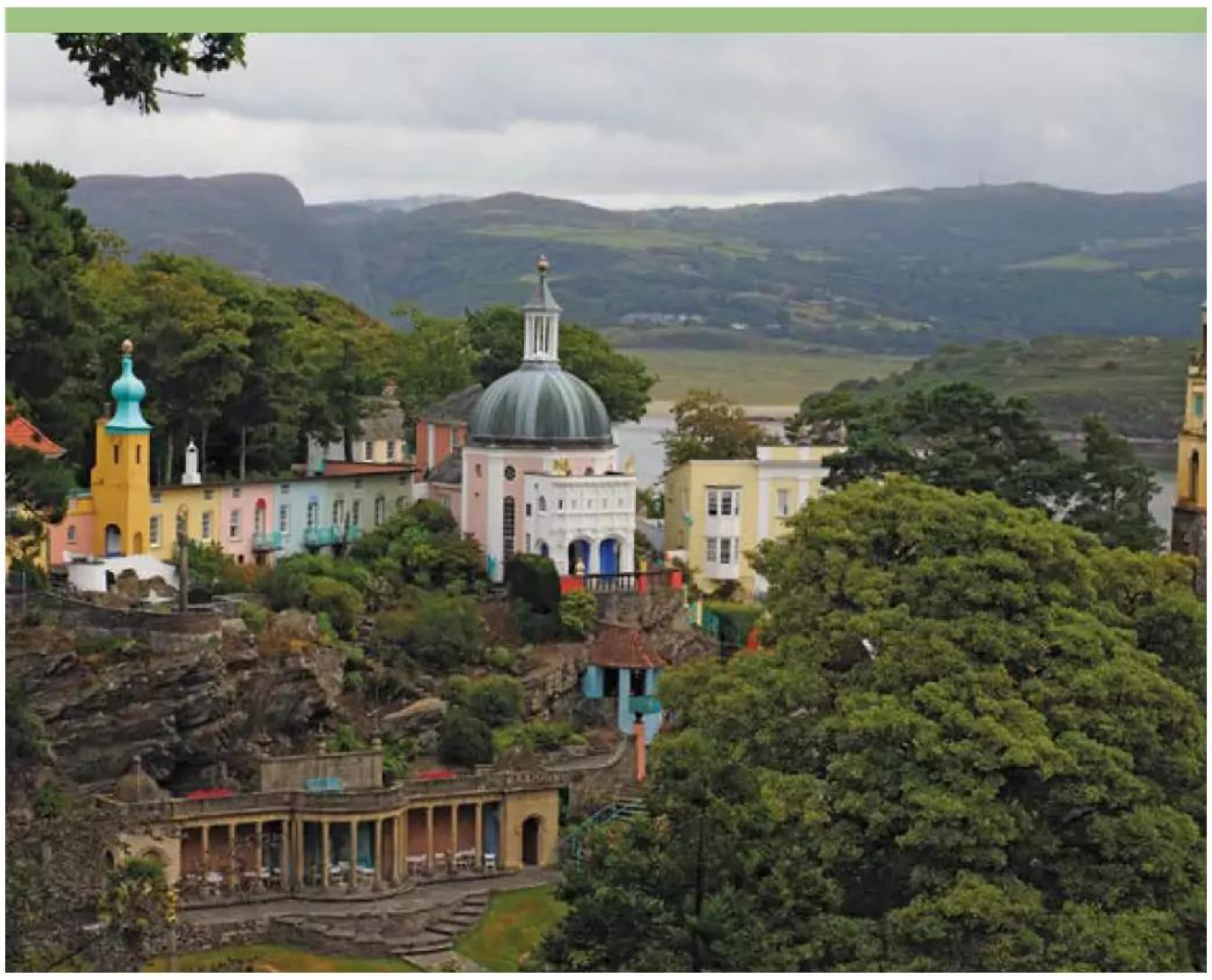
AA Campsite of the Year Scotland 2023/24, Sands of Luce Holiday Park sits right beside Luce Bay where there are seven miles of sandy beach to enjoy. Pitches are fully serviced hardstandings and there are toilets, showers, family rooms, dedicated accessible facilities, a laundry room and dishwashing area. Also on site is a restaurant (with takeaway available) and bar, which hosts regular events and entertainment. There's even a farm park (independently run) which offers the chance to meet alpacas, goats, lambs and ponies and also escorted beach treks with alpacas and horses.

The holiday park is only half a mile from the village of Sandhead where there is a hotel with restaurant and seven miles away is the larger town of Stranraer with more facilities. A 30-minute drive away is Cairnryan ferry terminal where a two-hour crossing takes you to Larne or Belfast in Northern Ireland. It's then only an hour to Ballyness Caravan Park (also featured in this article) if you also fancy exploring the Antrim heritage coast.

WALES

PORTMEIRION MOTORHOME PARK

Minffordd, Penrhyndeudraeth, Gwynedd LL48 6ER
T 01766 770000
W portmeirion.wales/stay
OPEN 1 April – 31 October


Bradley Pritchard Jones/Unsplash

Handily located at Portmeirion village, this motorhome park is perfect for anyone looking to visit the famous Italian-inspired attraction on Wales' northwest coast. There are 23 pitches available in different sizes, from a small pitch of 5.5m by 4m up to an 8m by 5m large pitch.

Each pitch has electric hook-up, TV hook-up and a drinking water tap, along with access to washrooms, toilets, showers, WiFi, dishwashing and picnic areas. Dogs are not permitted. Guest have complimentary 24-hour access to Portmeirion and are permitted to use the heated outdoor pool (fee applies).

Portmeirion is home to a cluster of colour-washed buildings set around a central piazza, overlooking the coast and with woodland adjacent. The village has gift shops, cafés, restaurants, bars and a spa. There is also a subtropical forest with 20 miles of paths to explore.

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SCAN ME

BEACH DAYS
BEST DAYS

SOUTH LYTCHETT MANOR CARAVAN & CAMPING PARK

DORSET

Meet the owners of this award-winning site in the heart of Dorset

Nestled in the heart of Dorset, this award-winning site features beautifully landscaped grounds and five-star amenity blocks, along with an off-lead dog walk.

South Lytchett Manor has a variety of pitch types, including spacious grass, hardstanding, and fully serviced pitches – plus luxurious glamping options including unique stargazing yurts.

From the site, there's easy access to stunning beaches, picturesque countryside and local attractions, and you can relish the relaxing atmosphere and exceptional customer service that ensure an unforgettable stay. Whether you're unwinding in nature or exploring surroundings, South Lytchett Manor provides a perfect escape. We spoke to owners, Jo and Dave Bridgen, to find out more about the site...

How long have you been running your site?

We took ownership of the park on 24 December, 2006. This year we celebrate our nineteenth birthday under our ownership!

Tell us a little about your site and how it first began

South Lytchett Manor was a camping site way back in the 1960s. Lady Lees, the owner of the manor, decided to set up the campsite on the impressive driveway to the manor to aid her Christian charities. She even sold teas at the front gates served in her own china tea sets and silver teapots!

What did you do before becoming the owners of this site?

We retired from a family haulage business in 2004 and spent two years looking for a site, as we wanted to relocate from the Midlands. At the time, our eldest son, Ben, was travelling, and looking forward to moving to Dorset with his fiancée. Matthew, our middle son, was looking forward to joining us running the site as he is a fully trained craftsman, and our youngest, Megan, was 13 and excited to move to Dorset to finish her education.

What made you want to own and run a campsite?

Our love for camping and caravanning began as a family tradition, taking two small pop-up tents to France via the Poole to Cherbourg ferry. As the kids got older, we switched to a caravan, and now enjoy travelling across the UK in our motorhome when we get time off. Our passion for the outdoors and the joy of sharing those experiences with others motivated us to own and run a campsite, where we are able to help create a welcoming space for our guests to make their own lasting memories.

What do you like about being a campsite owner?

The best part of the job is the chance to connect with our guests and see them create wonderful memories together. We get to meet

IT'S ALL ABOUT BUILDING A COMMUNITY WHERE EVERYONE FEELS WELCOME AND LEAVES WITH GREAT STORIES TO TELL!

people from all different backgrounds, and nothing makes us happier than seeing their smiling faces enjoying our campsite and the beauty of Dorset. When we read the lovely reviews they share on social media, it really warms our hearts and reminds us why we do what we do. It's all about building a community where everyone feels welcome and leaves with great stories to tell!

What are the challenges?

Owning a campsite comes with its challenges, particularly due to the weather. We have diversified our offerings to attract guests throughout the year. We've invested in the glamping market, offering our new stargazing yurts, plus Romany caravans, shepherd's huts, and pods, which provide an alternative to traditional camping. This type of accommodation is designed to appeal to families and couples looking for a unique getaway.

What do you feel makes your site special?

We have guests who are still returning after 15-plus years, and it is lovely to remember these children in 2007 who are now grown up and are visiting us with their families. Returning guests love the fact we do not sit on our laurels; every year we reinvest in new pitches, upgrades on amenity blocks, and new glamping options.

What do you love about the region your site is based in?

There are so many to choose from! Some of our favourite places nearby include Sandbanks, Brownsea Island, Bournemouth, the New Forest, the Purbeck Hills, Old Harry Rocks, Corfe Castle, Swanage, Kingston Lacy house, and Wimborne.

What do you like to do on a rare day off?

On a day off, we enjoy spending time outdoors, whether it's hiking, cycling, or taking our dog, Molly, for a walk. We especially love visiting some of our favourite places like Wareham, RSPB Arne Nature Reserve, Corfe Castle, Old Harry Rocks, and Hengistbury Head.

SOUTH LYTCHETT MANOR
MOTORHOME, CARAVAN & CAMPING PARK
SOUTH LYTCHETT MANOR
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Information

SOUTH LYTCHETT MANOR CARAVAN & CAMPING PARK
Dorchester Road,
Lytchett Minster, Poole BH16 6JB
T 01202 622577
E info@southlytchettmanor.co.uk
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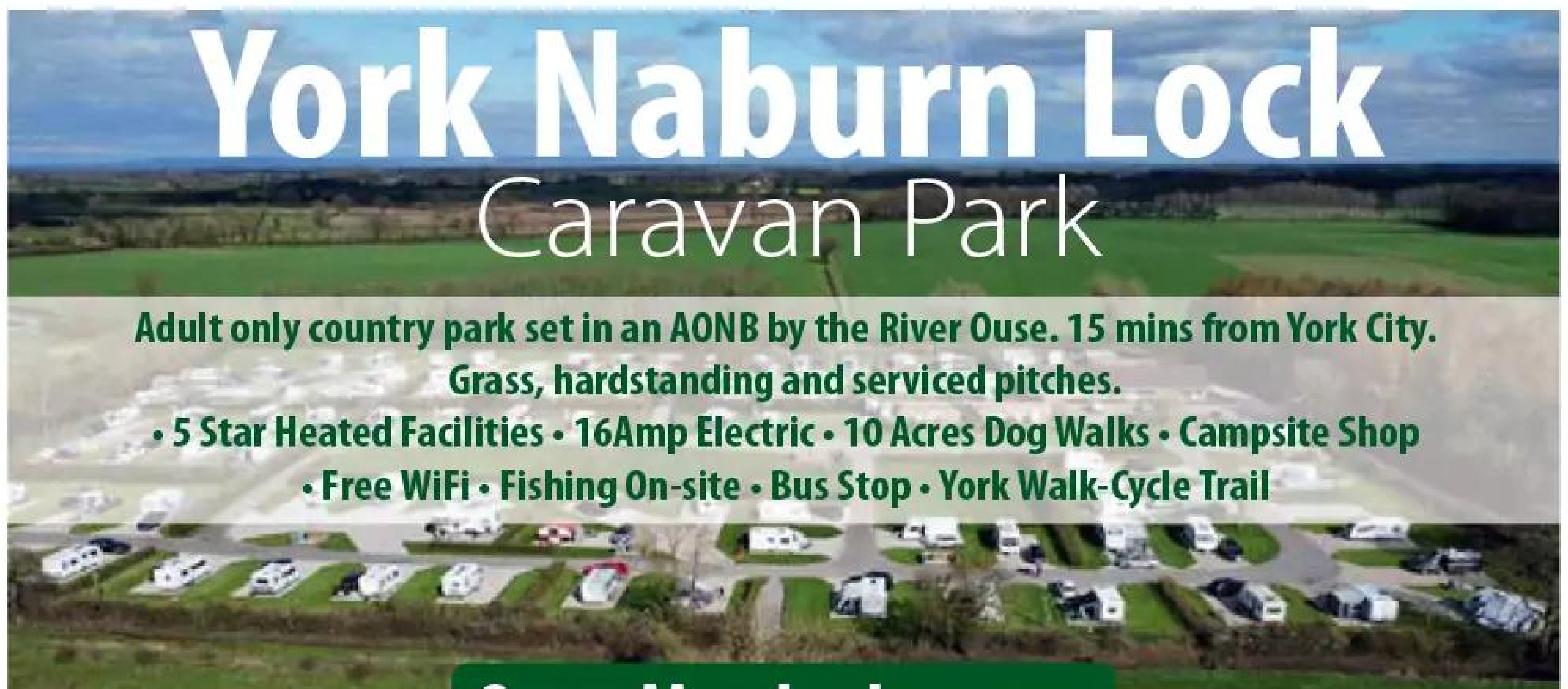

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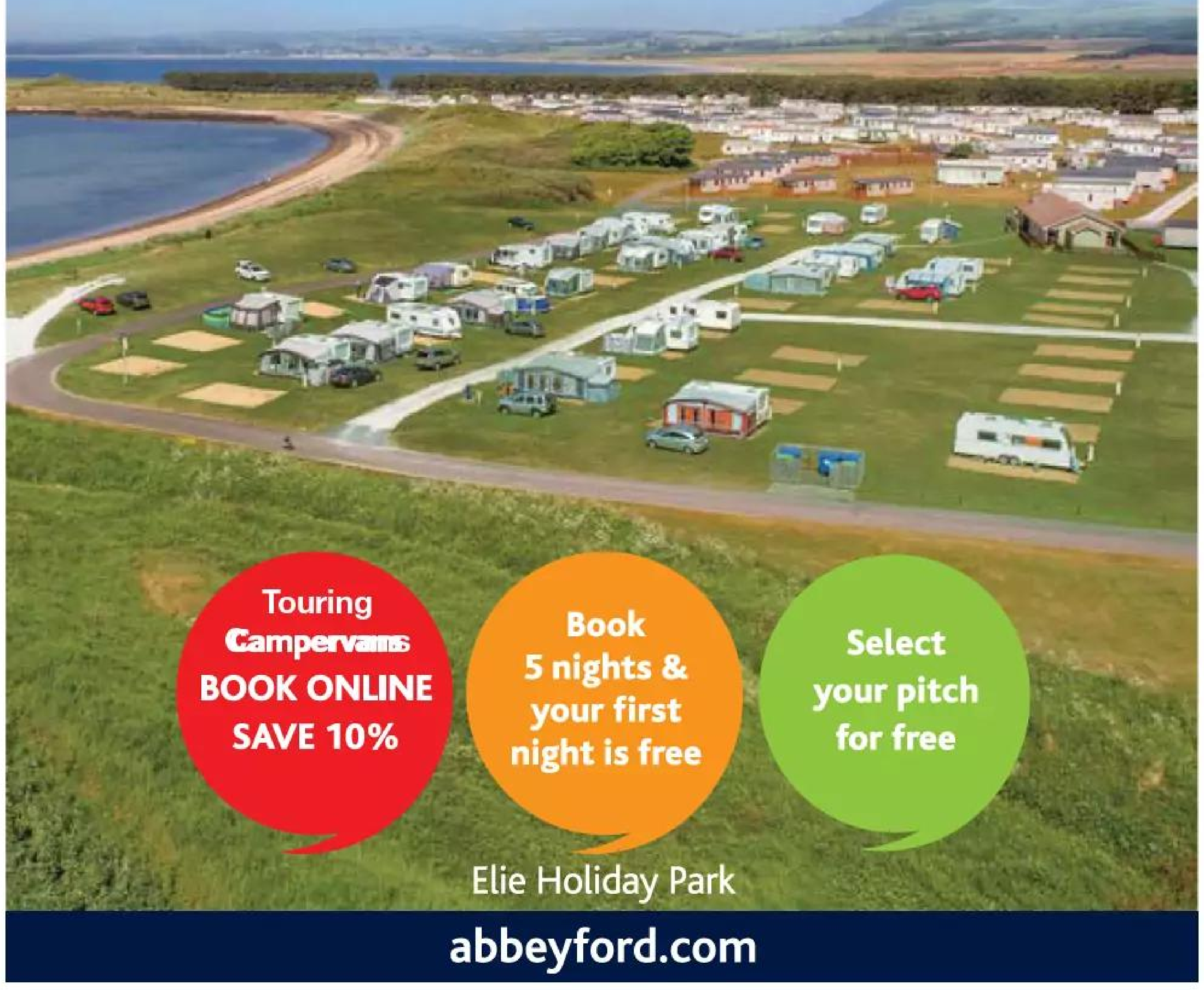

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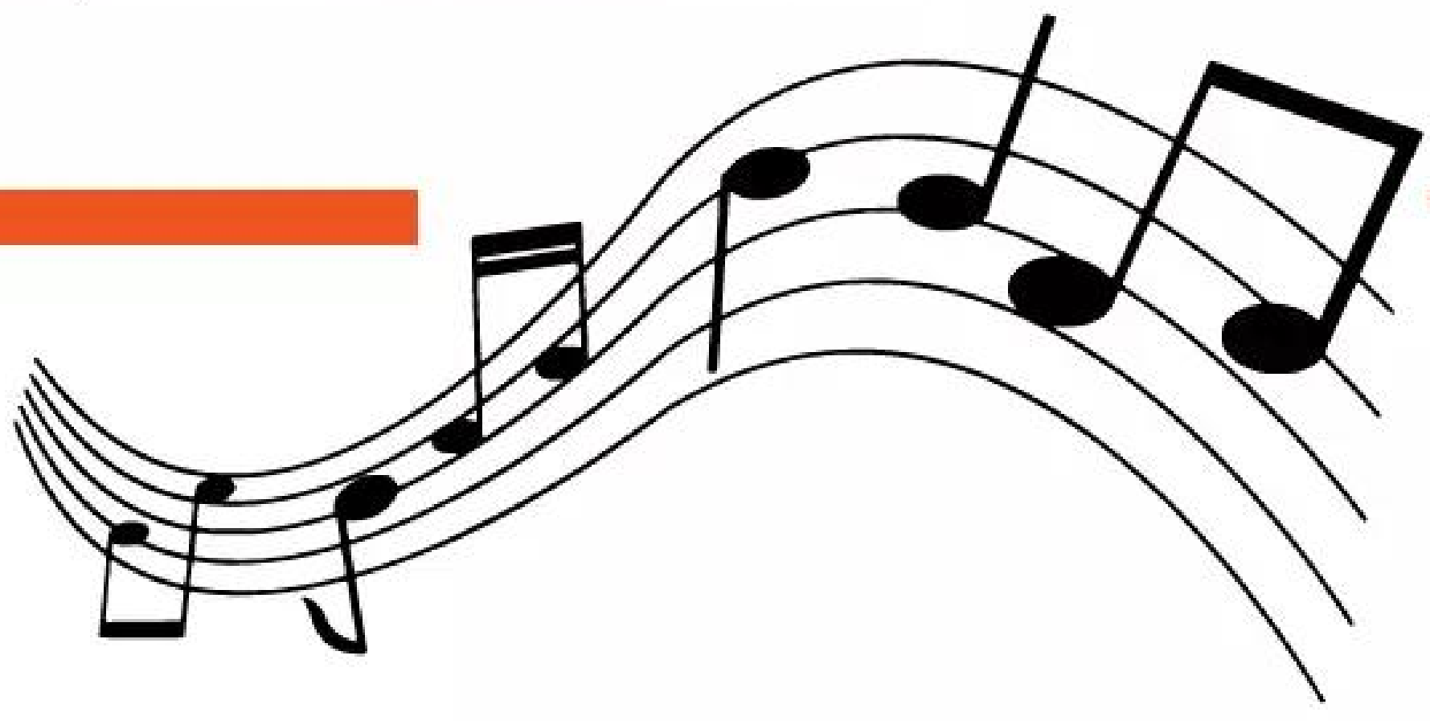
Anja/sock.adobe.com

Music festivals and campervans go hand in hand. And if you've not been to a festival before, or haven't tried one since you were a teenager, then you might be surprised by what you find. The days when festivals were exclusively for youngsters and people with 'alternative lifestyles' are long gone. Nowadays, festivals are an established part of mainstream British summer life – chilled-out weekends packed with live music and great food, supplemented by all manner of other activities, including comedy, talks, crafts, interesting trader stalls, or most likely a mix of all of these.

Modern-day festivals cater for people of all ages and tastes – from young couples to families – and you definitely don't have to be young to enjoy them. Many festivals are aimed at older music fans, and toilet and washing facilities have improved dramatically over the years.

You don't even need to travel far. You'll find details of events nearer home, sometimes on a smaller scale but nearly always catching the carefree essence of the most complete campervan festival weekends.



Fancy taking your campervan to a festival? Here's everything you need to know

FESTIVALS WITH KIDS

Wickham Festival

Many of us who went to festivals in the boom years of the 90s and early 2000s now have kids of our own and want the chance to relive our youth – but in a much more family-friendly way.

If you've never done it before, taking children to a festival might seem like a daunting thought, but as long as you're well-prepared it can be a great weekend for the whole family.

The key is picking the right festival. Lots of festivals advertise themselves as being family-friendly and this usually means they are a bit more compact, have lots of activities and attractions for kids and are generally a bit more mellow than the mega rock gigs.

On stage that means a combination of acts designed to appeal to everyone – re-formed 80s pop bands, 90s indie veterans and promising newcomers rubbing shoulders with stars of kids' TV like Mr Tumble, Katy Ashworth and Mr Bloom from CBeebies. Family-friendly festivals often have a dedicated section for young people where you'll find fairground rides, craft workshops, book readings and entertainment. The range and variety will depend on the size of the event but most have enough to keep even the most easily distracted kids occupied for a while.

The major thing to consider is whether your kids are likely to enjoy themselves. If they don't enjoy big crowds or loud music then you might as well forget it, because even the most family-friendly festival is going to have both of those.

CHOOSING AND BOOKING

Of course there are lots of music festivals, of all sizes and shapes, and the choice might be overwhelming, so the first thing to do is decide what takes your fancy. It's all about the overall vibe. Don't just make a decision based on the big headline acts; think about all the other bands on stage and what else is on offer to entertain you for the full weekend.

Festival season runs roughly from May until September. The Association of Independent Festivals (AIF) not-for-profit trade body, for example, says it represents over 100 festivals with visitor capacities ranging from 500 to over 75,000.

Once you've decided which festival you want to go to, do book your tickets early. Many festivals offer 'early bird' discounts, which mean you get cheaper tickets if you book before a certain date. Some also offer you the chance to pay up in instalments, which makes it much more affordable, especially for families..

WHERE TO PITCH YOUR CAMPERVAN AT A FESTIVAL

If you can, arriving at the festival site early is a good idea, too. Sometimes you can get in the night before the 'official' start day which means you will beat the queues. Most festivals

Van Morrison

PaulCampbel/IPhotography/Tartan Heart Bella

Wickham Festival

are on fields in the countryside, so the surrounding roads can struggle to cope with the volume of traffic.

Getting there early means you get a better choice of pitch, too. Deciding where to park up your campervan is important. Organisers generally are getting better at ensuring a decent gap between camping units. There is a health and safety aspect to this: your vehicle might be perfectly safe, but there's no way of knowing about your neighbour's.

You might decide you want to be close to the main festival arena, but remember that is probably going to be a busy thoroughfare. You might prefer to camp near the toilets... but not too near. Park your 'van close to landmarks you'll remember and be able to see above all the other tents and campervans. Put up a flag or banner by your vehicle to help you find it again.

Once you've decided where you want to camp, make sure you know where all the

Wickham Festival

WHICH FESTIVAL SHOULD YOU GO TO?

Here's a selection of great events to consider for your next campervan festival experience in the UK. The best festivals for campervans tend to be the smaller, more intimate events

1 CAMPERVAN CAMPOUT 2-5 MAY

This mini-festival at the South of England Showground in Ardingly is brought to you by the people behind Campervan magazine, Out & About Live, and the successful Warners Shows. It's a great mix of camping, live music (Radio 2's Sara Cox is the headline act in 2025), fab food and drink, fun activities, and more. Throw in lots of sparkling new campervans to feast your eyes on and some essential vanlife advice and you have all the ingredients for a fantastic weekend.

W campervancampout.co.uk

WWW.CAMPERVANCAMPO
campervan CAMPOUT
SHOWS
1

2 WYCHWOOD 30 MAY – 20 JUNE

Its timing at the end of May/start of June means Wychwood kicks off the UK's music festival season each year. And its location – Cheltenham's world-famous racecourse – makes for a pretty perfect setting. The organisers always seem to bring in an eclectic mix of musical acts and other activities for all ages and tastes – the 2025 headliners are James, Doves and Shed 7. The circus workshops, in particular, help make it that bit more unique.

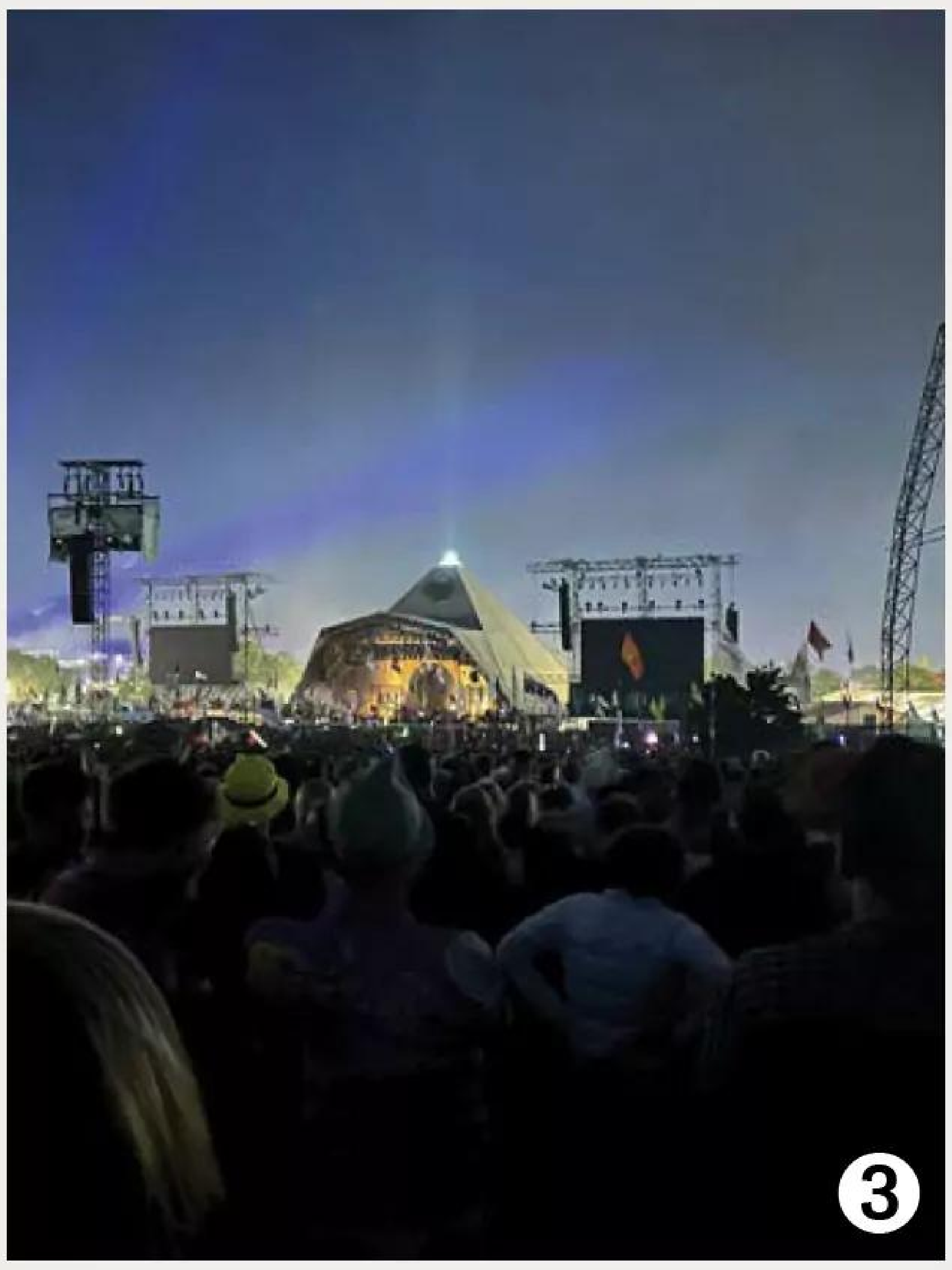
W wychwoodfestival.com

Wychwood Festival

3 GLASTONBURY 25-29 JUNE

There's an argument that everybody should get the chance to go to Glastonbury Festival at some point in their lives. This is the grandaddy of festivals and is known as the largest greenfield music and performing arts festival in the world. Not bad for its humble beginnings when it was free. If you go, you'll be sharing your weekend with over 200,000 other folk, but you'll be absolutely spoilt for acts to see.

W glastonburyfestivals.co.uk



Glastonbury Festival

4 TARTAN HEART
31 JULY – 2 AUGUST

Belladrum's sprawling estate near Inverness is the venue but despite all the space, this is a festival that keeps its visitor numbers down to the 20,000 level. Nevertheless, it's big enough to attract the likes of Van Morrison, Nile Rodgers and Travis – as well as being a natural home to more local acts of all levels. This yer's headliners are Paul Heaton, Texas and Supergrass. There's a different theme, too, for dressing up and any other antics. In 2024, the theme is the silver screen.

W tartanheartfestival.com

Tartan Heart

5 GREEN MAN
14-17 AUGUST

Wales's number one festival is a heady mix of music and scenery (thanks to the Brecon Beacons) plus environmental awareness. There's also dedicated campervan camping – indeed, there's even the opportunity to arrive extra early, pre-festival and use it as a base for exploring more of Wales. The 2025 line-up hadn't been announced at the time of writing.

W greenman.net

Nici Eenberl/Green Man

TOP TIPS

SET UP BASECAMP

If the main festival arena is some distance from the campsite you might want to set up a temporary base for your gang there. This can be as simple as a blanket and some camping chairs – but you can also add a beach shade or umbrella to protect the youngsters from the sun's rays (or the rain!).

STAY SAFE

It goes without saying that keeping your children safe is the number one priority for parents at a festival. Keep your eyes on your kids all the time, as obvious as that sounds. Youngsters can disappear in the blink of an eye in a big crowd and it can be difficult to pick them out of the throng. Try and dress your kids in something distinctive so they stand out when you scan your eyes across the sea of bodies.

One tip is to write your mobile number on the inside of your kids' wristband or on a custom made ID bracelet so you can be contacted if they do go astray.

As soon as you arrive at the festival, spend a few minutes telling your children what to do if they get lost. Point out festival staff and tell them to approach them if they go missing. The stage areas always have festival staff and security around them. For older kids, suggest a meeting point that they should head to if you get split up.

The other thing to consider is ear protection. It's fine for you and I when they turn it the amps up to 11 but small people's ears are more sensitive, so it is definitely worth investing in a pair of colourful ear protectors.

ON THE WAGON

A small wagon is an essential if you have young children at a festival. Early on they'll be full of energy but as the day progresses it's more than likely they'll start to run out of steam. Fill the trolley with cushions and blankets and you'll have an instant portable bed where they can snuggle up while you watch the headliners. Festival veterans even like to glam their wagons up with bunting and flags.

nearest fresh water taps, first aid tents, fire points, etc, are.

At some festivals you can book an electric hook-up. That's going to be down to personal preference. Chances are your leisure battery will provide enough electrical juice on board to see you through the weekend, but there will be those who seek a bit of extra solace in being able to call on mains electricity – just note it'll probably be from a generator and may not be as powerful/reliable as you hope. An alternative option is a portable power station from a company like Jackery, EcoFlow, Bluetti and Anker.

Make sure you have enough gas in your cylinder(s) to get you through the weekend. Having said that, some festivals do indeed offer a cylinder exchange service.

Tartan Heart

FOOD AND DRINK

One of the best things about festivals is the food stalls, which offer up tempting dishes from all over the world. However, tasty as they are, they are not great value for money. Feeding a family of four could easily set you back £25 to £30 per meal and that quickly adds up over a weekend; there's usually plenty of variety, but they will eat into your finances. Bring your own and maybe even consider a coolbox as a useful supplement to your campervan fridge. Even better if it's portable – you may want to bring it along with you for the day ahead. Just note many festivals do not allow you to take your own food into their main arenas, and even those that do, usually ban alcohol.

You will normally be allowed to take bottles of water into the arena, though, and you can usually top these up from taps dotted around the festival site.

By all means rely on your phones and cards to pay for things, if you can, but WiFi connections, etc, aren't always the most dependable in festival scenarios, so a small amount of cash is useful.

Whatever weekend festival you go to, you'll be surrounded by fellow campers of the friendliest variety, so help is always going to be close at hand. Remember, also, that nearly all such festivals raise money for good causes.

Joshua Atkins/Wychwood Festival

✓ CAMPERVAN FESTIVAL KIT

WHAT YOU SHOULD TAKE

Basically, you should take what you normally would for any weekend away in your campervan, although certain items may go further up the priorities list:

✓ **Levelling ramps.** No doubt already on board, but don't be tempted to optimise storage space by leaving them at home. Even the best festival sites are not going to be level in places

✓ **Lightweight camping chairs.** Most music festivals provide plenty of space in their main arenas for you to set up your own little seating area. Blankets can be a blessing, too

✓ **Waterproofs.** Festivals usually take place in the British summer, and that means there's a good chance of rain, so make sure you pack your waterproof jackets. Wellies are advisable, too

✓ **Sun protection.** Of course, the sun also shines now and then, too, so bring hats and sunscreen

✓ **Awning.** You may want the extra shelter and/or storage/bedroom a driveway awning can provide, especially if you have the kids with you

✓ **Ear plugs.** The music can get loud and it might be a bit too much for your kids, especially. And late-night parties aren't unheard of. Sets of earplugs could prove a benefit

✓ **Toilet and tent?** Not got a plumbed-in toilet in your campervan? They're not always as bad as you expect, but if you don't fancy the festival toilets there's a solution: bring your own portable toilet and put it in a toilet tent beside your 'van

✓ **Towing eye.** Festivals can get more than their fair share of mud, with paths and roadways likely to get more churned up through sheer volume of use. There's a possibility you'll need to be towed out, so make sure your campervan is suitably ready for such an eventuality

WHAT YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE

✗ **Don't bring glass.** You're camping. You may even be on land that reverts to being a farmer's field after the festival. Broken glass can be a particularly nasty hazard, and not just for humans

✗ **Your pets,** although some do allow pets in the camping area, but not the main arena. Honestly, though, most pets will not enjoy the festival environment one little bit

✗ **Umbrellas.** They might help keep you dry in the bigger downpours, but just think of the folk behind you

✗ **Don't overpack.** Make sure you only take what you need for a weekend's camping, admittedly in slightly different surroundings

✗ **A bad attitude.** Don't ruin it for others! Even if you're not enjoying the music, you'll soon find plenty of other attractions

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Wickham Festival

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GEAR OF THE YEAR 2025

Looking to stock up on new accessories for your campervan adventures? You won't find any better than this selection of award-winning kit

Every 12 months, our colleagues at *Camping* magazine celebrate the best outdoor kit of the year.

The annual Out & About Live Camping Awards are the biggest and best in the UK – covering tents and accessories of all kinds.

Of course, lots of the camping equipment that is used by tent campers is just as useful for campervanners. And that's why we've picked out some of the highlights of the 2025 awards that we know campervanners will love.

The Camping Awards are all about helping readers decide how to spend their hard-earned cash.

When money is tight, you need to know that the gear you're spending your cash on is worth the outlay. Value for money, innovation, versatility and style are all taken into account when it comes to handing out the prizes. But sometimes it just comes down to what has that indefinable something, the X factor that sets it apart from everything else.

The winning products are varied, but all have one thing in common – the expert seal of approval.

BEST LIGHTING

VANGO COMET LIGHT

When it comes to camping gear, we always love a product that is versatile and has multiple uses. And that's why the new Vango Comet Light leapt out at us as soon as we set eyes on it. It is a three-in-one, rechargeable lamp that works as a torch, a table lantern or a standard lamp. With its telescopic stand and sturdy tripod base, at first glance, the Comet looks a little like a camera tripod, and it works in much the same way. At its lowest setting, it works as a lantern, the stable tripod feet making it ideal to sit on the ground or a table. Alternatively, you can extend the height to up to 110cm to create a corner lamp, with a swivel head that allows you to direct the light in the

BEST SLEEPING BAG

OUTWELL CALDERA

Space is always at a premium in a campervan and bedding is often – literally – the biggest problem. If you want warmth and comfort then you pay the price in boot size. Smaller packs tend to contain less cosy bags. However, Outwell's new Caldera single gets the balance right... it comes in three fill weights – regular, Lux and Supreme – and each has a small pack size. The regular is little bigger than a one-litre soft drink bottle, so they are easy to squash into a corner of the 'van.

Comfort comes from the soft polyester outer and brushed lining as well as the recycled premium insulation. There's a pillow pocket in the hood and an internal pocket for storing small items.

Starting at £71.99, this is a future classic.

outwell
Outwell
CALDERA

direction you prefer. Pegging points in the feet give extra stability. When it's all folded away, the unit works as a pocket torch, perfect for night-time dog walking or toilet block excursions.

There are three brightness options available (200, 500 and 1,000 lumens) and it is waterproof rated to IPX4.

The rechargeable battery takes five hours to recharge and, according to Vango, runs for up to 12 hours on the lowest brightness setting.

BEST COOLBOX/FRIDGE

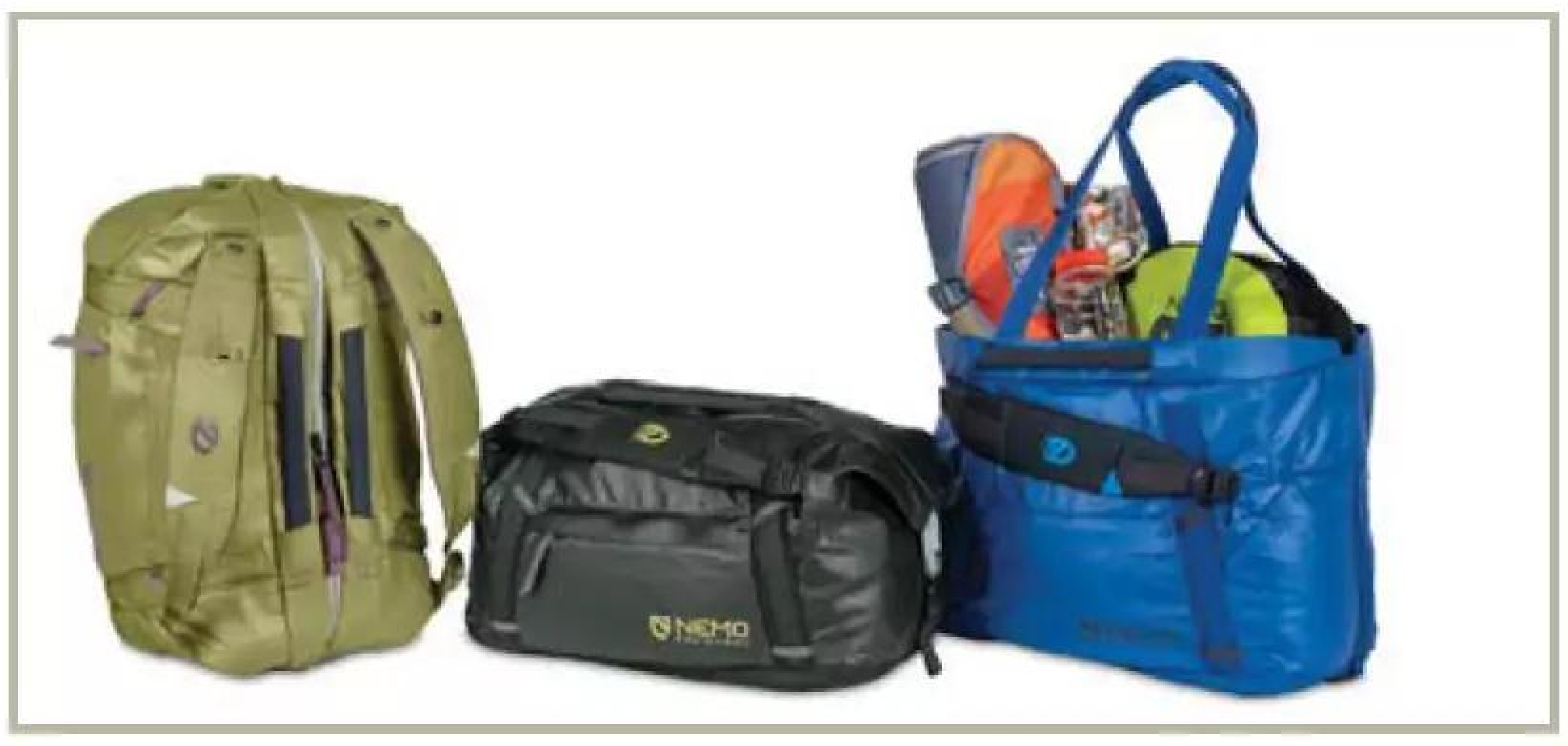
COLEMAN PRO 55QT WHEELED COOLER

After years of being a camping and outdoor staple, in the Instagram and TikTok age, coolboxes have unexpectedly become one of the most sought-after pieces of camping equipment. Brands like Yeti have made coolers, well, cool. In response, the likes of Coleman have hit back with their own alternatives to the social media influencers' favourite. Coleman's new top-of-the-range PRO coolers have the same rugged good looks but enjoy the performance benefits derived from the brand's decades of experience in the market. And best of all, they are much less expensive that the Yetis of this world.

The largest option in the range is the PRO 55QT Wheeled Cooler – a 52-litre, heavy-duty passive coolbox with large, rugged wheels and a telescopic handle that makes transporting your gear easy. Performance-wise, Coleman reckons this cooler will keep ice frozen for up to five days thanks to its fully insulated body and lid. The robust latch is designed to be easy to open one-handed and it also has a lockable lid, so you can keep your food and drink safe, as well as cool, on the campsite.

A worthy contender, and highly commended in this category, was the Outwell Eagle Van. Designed for use between the front seats on campervans, the Eagle Van soft cooler features a large Velcro, U-shape top opening for easy access. It is said that it will keep the contents cool for 13 hours using an 800ml ice block thanks to the 20mm foam. Features include twin carry handles, mesh side pockets, and an easy-clean lining.

Coleman PRO



BEST CAMPING BAG

NEMO DOUBLE HAUL

There are loads of duffel bags out there for campers but the Double Haul from US camping brand, Nemo, was *Camping*'s top pick for 2025. It rises above the rest largely thanks to its versatility – as well as functioning as a traditional duffel with the top closed and clipped down, it also operates as a giant tote bag that allows you to haul your camping gear around the site.

The thinking behind the Double Haul is that we use our equipment in different ways to meet the requirements of whatever adventure we're embarking on. Sometimes you'll need a bag that operates like a backpack, other times you'll want to buckle it up and fold it down as small as possible so it can be checked onto a flight. And sometimes you'll be happy to leave it open and just throw it in the back of your 'van. The Double Haul lets do all of these, so effectively you're getting three quality bags in one.

In tote mode, the bag has a huge top opening built to remain wide open while you pack and that lets you cram in up to a third more gear. Imagine a better-built version of one of those big rubble sacks, and you'll get a rough idea. The tucked-away handles make it easier to lug the full bag. It's clever and useful, which all good camping kit should be.

BEST POWER SOURCE

NEBO ULTIMATE POWER PACK

There was a time when the only energy source you ever needed on a campervan trip was a bacon butty and a mug of coffee. These days, even the most hardcore camper wants to make sure they can keep their phone or GPS device topped up, and that means having a power source. On a campsite with mains hook-up that's not a problem, but on a basic site or if you're wild camping it requires a different approach.

Nebo made its name with portable lighting, but now has a range of power banks and power stations. This is its flagship product, the Nebo Ultimate – a multipurpose power pack that, as the name suggests, claims to be the ultimate solution for power on the move. It certainly offers plenty of options for campervanners – including an AC mains outlet, a power bank, USB ports, a three-mode floodlight, a battery jump starter and air compressor for inflating tyres. And if all that wasn't enough, you can safely take it on holiday should you need it, as it is fully compliant for carry-on air travel. At £250, this is not cheap, but its ability to keep all your devices full of juice should make it priceless.

NEBO
220-240 VOLTS
ULTIMATE

BEST CAMPING TABLE

ZEMPIRE KITPAC PRO LARGE

Zempire's versatile new Kitpac Pro Large camping table is perfect for your table needs, whether it's for al fresco family meals or evening games of Dobble in the awning. You can adjust the legs to different heights with the flick of a lever and the angled legs improve stability.

The four-panel slatted design means it easily folds down small for packing but also allows you to drop the side panels to change the tabletop size to suit your needs and the space you have in the awning. The natural bamboo top is food-safe and heat resistant, and the finishing touch is the built-in bottle opener.

BEST CAMPING CHAIR

OLPRO OLYMPUS XL

With a 130kg weight capacity, this XL, steel-framed camping chair from Olpro provides a comfy and sturdy seat that remains stable on uneven terrain. The rounded 'bucket' style seat, with padded fabric, is ergonomically designed, providing great lumbar support that helps you to unwind, whether you're in your awning, at the beach or relaxing in the garden. Plus, its insulated cup holder ensures you've always got a refreshment close to hand. The carry bag makes it easy to transport the chair to and from your pitch.

This is another great example of well-made and good-value product from a successful British brand.

BEST ACCESSORY

LIGHT MY FIRE CAMPKIT FOR 4

When it comes to camping and outdoor kit, the Scandinavians certainly know their stuff. From Sweden, this cooking kit from Light My Fire contains absolutely everything for the campervanner whose culinary ambitions extend beyond adding hot water to a packet of dried spag bol. But even if you never cook a thing, you'd want this in your camping kit simply because it looks so good.

The 19-piece kit includes a weatherproof firestarter and all-natural Tinder-on-a-Rope to get your campfire going, plus two Grandpa's FireForks and a versatile Grandpa's FireGrill for cooking. The lidded cups, plates and sporks have a beautifully ergonomic Nordic look to them, but our favourite piece has to be the super-cute salt and pepper shaker. In predictable Scandi style, the tableware is made from an eco-friendly, biomass-based material called Ecozen. It is developed from European grown, GM-free corn starch.

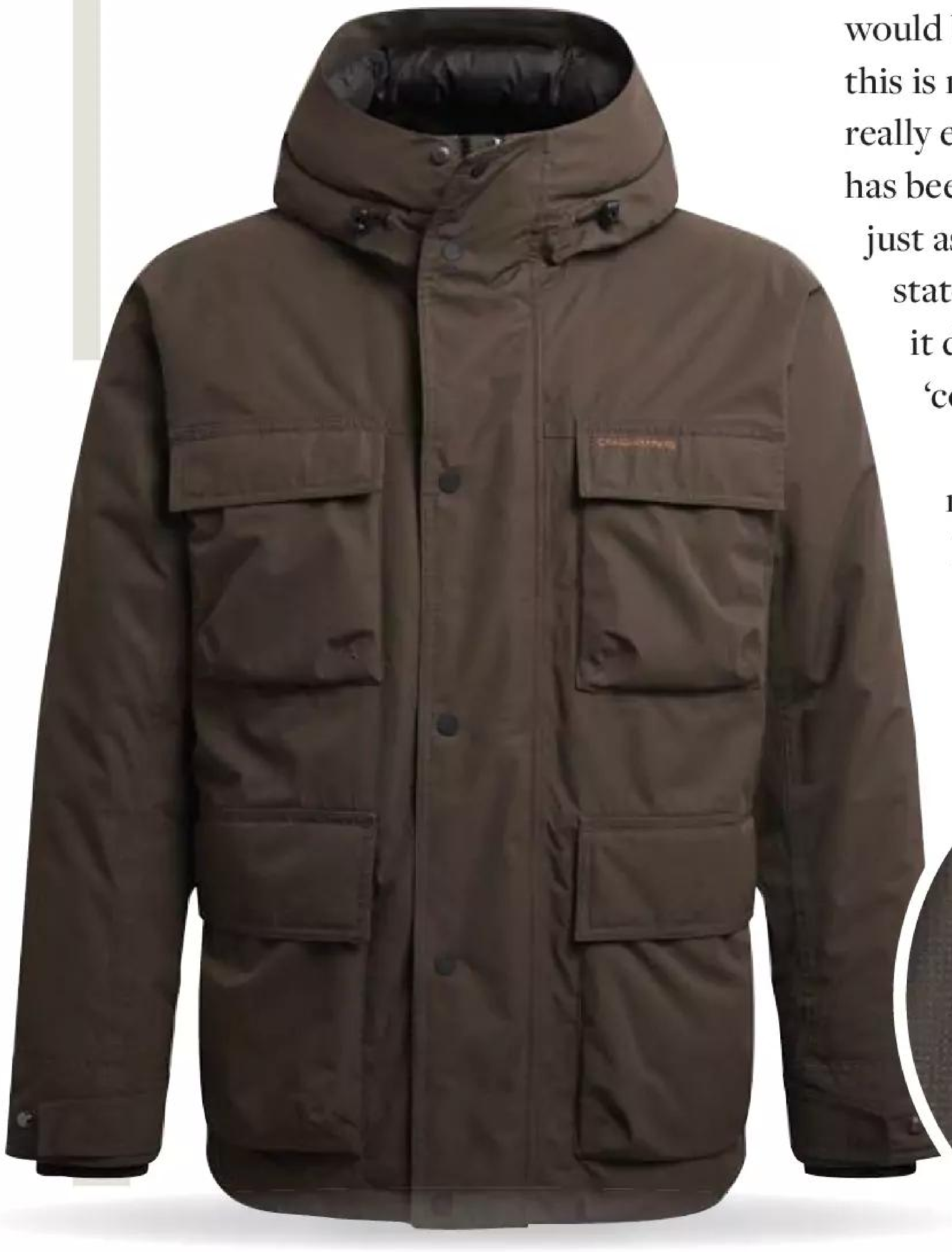
BEST WATERPROOF JACKET

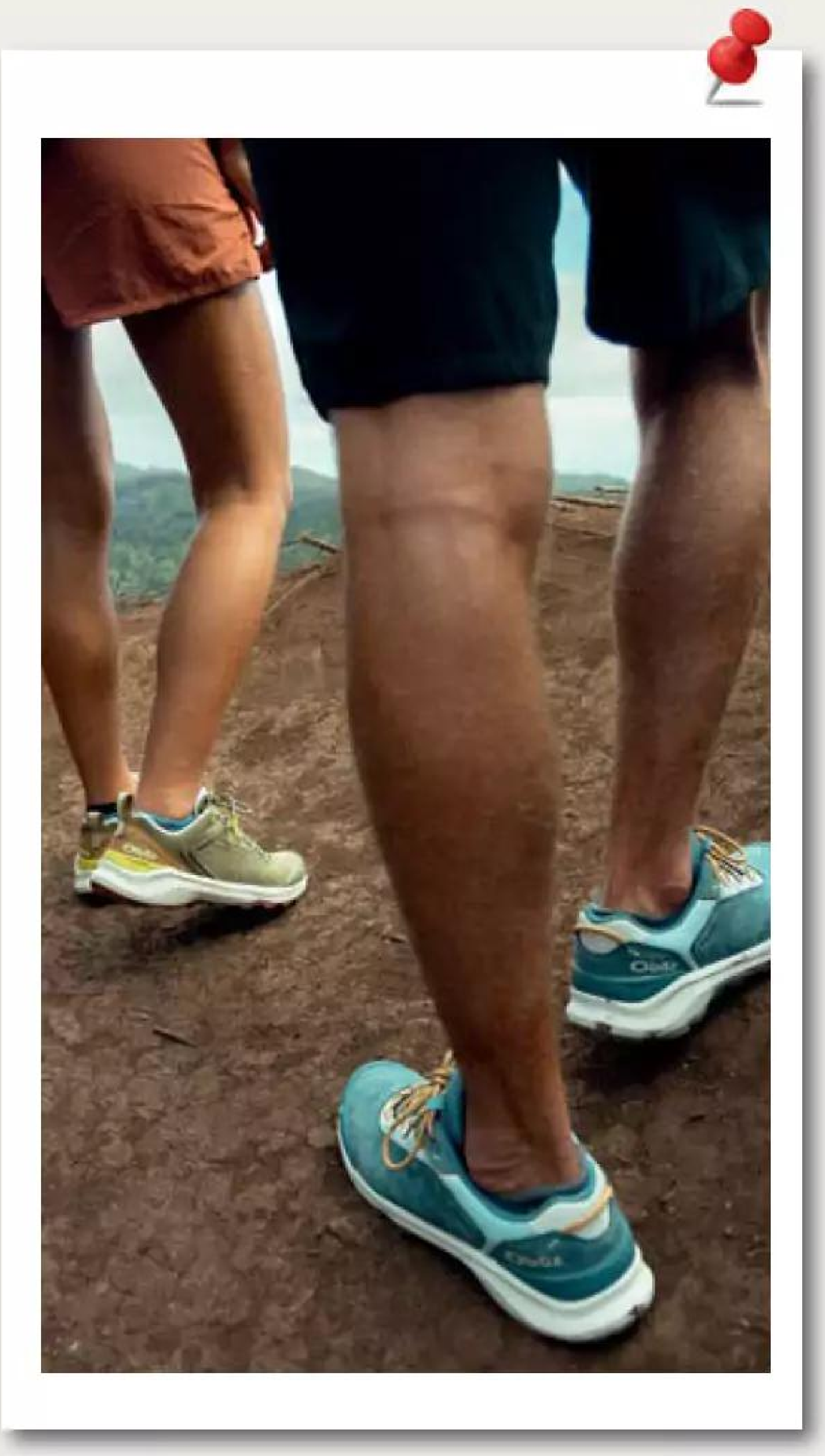
CRAGHOPPERS MEN'S NATIONAL TRUST HAMPS JACKET

As campers, many of us spend a good amount of our time visiting the National Trust's beautiful properties and landscapes. So, it's great to see a brand like Craghoppers team up with the organisation to help it with essential restoration projects across the UK.

The Hamps jacket is part of the Craghoppers x National Trust collection and 10% from every sale goes directly to the National Trust to help with its work. So, based on that fact alone this is a waterproof jacket that would be worth your consideration. But this is not just a charity case – it's a really excellent jacket in its own right. It has been deliberately designed to look just as smart on a walk around a stately home as it is on the hills – and it definitely passes the *Campervan* 'could you wear it to the pub?' test.

Made with 100% recycled materials, the construction tech hits the mark, as well, with the AquaDry construction making it waterproof and breathable.





BEST HIKING BOOTS

OBOZ COTTONWOOD LOW

If you love the great outdoors, then you'll want to use products that perform well but are also kind to the environment.

The Cottonwood is a really comfortable hiking shoe but what makes this offering from US company, Oboz, stand out is its impressive eco credentials. It is rooted in environmentally conscious design, with numerous recycled and recyclable elements, from the soles to the laces.

The waterproof upper has a full grain nubuck leather that can be traced back to the farm of birth, with no antibiotics or hormones, from ranchers that adhere to strict verified animal wellbeing standards. Additionally, the leather is produced using significantly less water than traditional methods.

Importantly, the Cottonwood doesn't fail on the performance front, either, and is a great shoe for low-level hillwalking that is comfy straight out of the box. We have been wearing them in all types of environment for the last six months, with no complaints whatsoever.

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PAWS ON TOUR

WIN As we know, campervanning has lots of benefits, not least an element of freedom. And one of the biggest plus points is that you can bring along your canine companions. Including your dog in your campervan adventures benefits your physical and mental health while away, and can elevate the whole experience, as you're with all family members.

This new series helps to ensure your dog enjoys your holiday as much as you do. Thanks to our sponsor, Tavo, we are giving away one of its Maeve dog car seat solution with stroller, worth £725. **Head to W motorhome.ma/tavocompcam to enter.**

WORDS: **Mike Hallam, Your Dog Editor**

BublikHaus/Shutterstock

Taking your dog on holiday can fill a gap you didn't know was open. But why?

Why bring your dog in your 'van?

With your own accommodation on wheels, you don't have to worry about any pet rules that come with renting a hotel room or B&B. Taking your dog to the loo is also a far more convenient process, as are its other requirements, such as feeding and walks.

Bringing your dog along is also more cost-effective than using kennels. In the UK, the average price of an overnight stay in a kennel is £20. Therefore, a getaway can quickly add up to a sum better spent elsewhere. But, most importantly, sharing a break with your dog makes it more fun and is healthier for you and your four-legged companion.

How your dog will benefit from a holiday with you

🐾 **New experiences:** With their heightened senses, most dogs are incredibly curious characters and enjoy new surroundings. Going away with their family can come as a much-needed break from routine and be beneficial in the same way as it is to humans. Likewise, being stuck in a routine can have the same negative impact on a dog as it can for humans.

🐾 **Home comforts:** It is important to remember items such as their regular bed, or a favourite toy to serve as a reminder of home. Some dogs can find new surroundings unsettling so using the scent of home comforts are a great way to encourage your dog to relax.

🐾 **To feel safe and enjoy your company:** Holidays are for treating yourself and the family, and that should include your canine pals, too. But first, a dog needs to feel safe and comfortable. Ensure your dog is happy with travelling (remember it is a legal requirement for dogs to be suitably restrained) and has all the resources it needs. Once your dog is comfy, you can all focus on having fun.

🐾 **Activity:** It goes without saying that your dog relishes being involved in family activities. While the beach is a great idea, dogs may only be permitted on some UK beaches from 1 October to 30 April. During the rest of the year, many beaches ban or restrict dogs, so check before travelling. Other family activities that welcome dogs include day trips to lakes or rivers, and walking in the British countryside. Many National Trust sites in the UK permit the entrance of dogs.

YOUR DOG Interested in more great dog advice and inspiration? See **Your Dog** magazine **W yourdog.co.uk**

PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

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NEWS

Find out what's going on in the world of campervanning

WOODA FARM HOLIDAYS CELEBRATES 50 YEARS

Wooda Farm Holidays, near Bude in Cornwall, is celebrating its 50th anniversary.

As part of the celebrations, from 12 to 14 September, the Premier Park will be hosting WoodaFest, a weekend of music, entertainment and local food. Entry will be free to guests staying on site that weekend,

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THE OFF-GRID CAMPERVAN THAT YOU CAN TALK TO!

RP Overland, the Yorkshire-based builder of off-road, off-grid Mercedes-based luxury campervans, has unveiled its latest innovation – a campervan that you can give voice instructions to. Using an iPad and RP's new Smart Assist, you can now talk to your campervan!

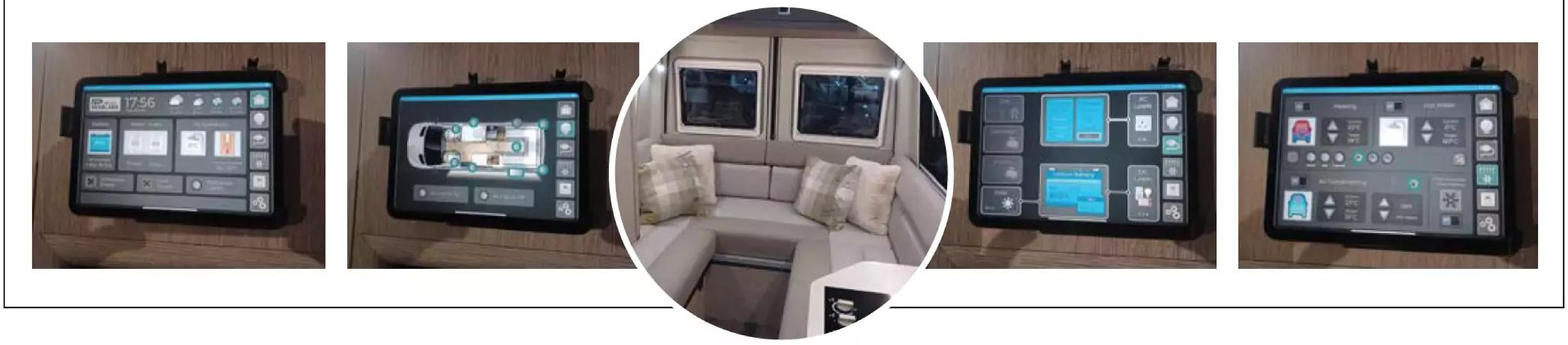
Steve Young, owner of RP, unveiled the company's new Rebel Raid model at the Caravan, Camping & Motorhome Show at the NEC in February, complete with the company's latest tech, which was developed in-house. Not only can you give the campervan instructions like, "Hey Siri, lights on" or "Hey Siri, night-time mode" but the new iPad system will send you alerts, via an app and email, if there are potential problems such as the temperature inside the vehicle dropping to a point where services might freeze, or the battery levels reduce too far. It will also copy these alerts to the RP factory, so that it can avoid disaster if the owner is away and cannot reach their vehicle.

Based on the six-metre Mercedes Sprinter 4x4, the new Rebel Raid also enjoys a number of other new features. It gets the generator system from the larger Rebellion, providing 5kW of power directly from the engine, for the first time in the 6m 'van.

There's also a new water filtration system, with three-stage filtering and a final stage that removes any taste from the polypropylene of the tank and requires no UV light. So, now you can have perfect drinking water wherever you are in the world. The Rebel Raid has a 184-litre fresh water tank, plus a further 10 litres in its boiler.

Finally, RP has introduced a powerful new automotive air-conditioning system mounted under the vehicle, which will only require regassing at the annual habitation service.

These new features (and more) will be seen in the 7m Rebellion when the new version is launched later this year.



but you do still need to book tickets in advance. As an extra anniversary year treat and a thank you for guests being part of Wooda's half-century journey, there will be special discounts and deals throughout 2025, which will be announced on the site's social media channels.

Services

TOP SERVICE STATION NAMED

A motorway service station best known for its farm shop, locally sourced food and beautiful surroundings has been named the best in the UK.

Gloucester Services on the M5 came top in the survey by Campervan rental provider, CamperDays.

The Gloucester service station also boasts 24-hour free showers, including disabled showers, as well as being dog-friendly.

Tebay Services (M6), Cairn Lodge Services (M74), Annandale Water (A74M) and Cobham Services (M25) were also given praise in the survey.

CAMPERVAN CONVERTER IN ADMINISTRATION

Award-winning campervan converter Autohaus has closed and called in administrators due to the "financial climate".

The Somerset-based company produced almost 200 campervans a year at its Minehead-based factory.

But it has now ceased operating and its website no longer works. Acare Leisure, which trades as Autohaus, called in the administrator, Leonard Curtis, in February.

Customers and suppliers affected by the move will be contacted "shortly".

In a message to customers emailing the company, Autohaus said: "We are very sorry to inform you that due to the financial climate Acare Leisure Ltd T/A Autohaus has ceased trading on 07/02/2025 and have appointed Leonard Curtis Insolvency Administrators.

"We have explored every avenue to continue, but sadly without any luck. I wish all our customers many happy years of holidays and road trips, and to suppliers who have supported us a big thank you. The factory is now closed."

Until recently, most of the Autohaus campervan range was built on VW Transporters but it had moved into alternative base vehicles, such as the Ford Transit Custom and Renault Trafic.

The new Ford-based Autohaus Spartan was named Best Pop-Top Campervan in the 2025 Out & About Live Campervan Awards.

NEW PUBLICATION FOR CAMPERVAN AND MOTORHOME BUYERS

The 2025 edition of *Buying Your Perfect Motorhome* has been launched.

This latest publication covers everything you need to know when choosing a campervan or motorhome, from layouts to base vehicles, weights and payloads to insurance and finance. It includes our top 20 new models of the 2025 season as well as examples of what you can buy on the pre-owned market between £15k and £60k.

The guide talk you through the first steps of deciding what campervan or motorhome will suit your needs and, reflecting current trends, looks at how to use your vehicle off-grid.

Completing this essential reading is a buyers' guide to the latest 2025-season motorhomes and campervans, plus a dealer directory so you can find out where to see the makes and models on your shortlist.

● **To buy a copy of *Buying Your Perfect Motorhome* go to mymagazinesub.co.uk/mmm/special-editions/details/buying-your-perfect-motorhome-2025**

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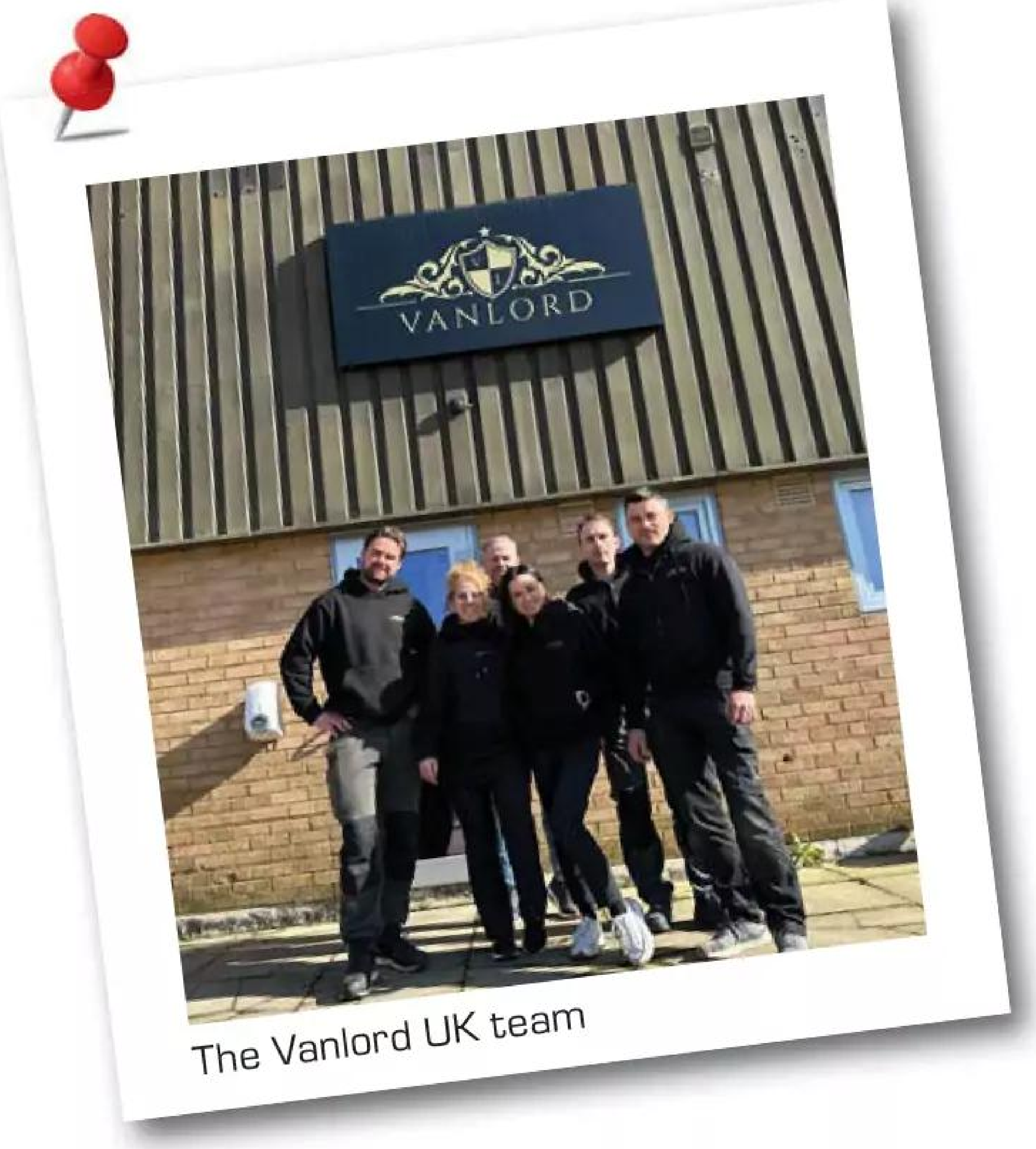
VANLORD UK

We meet a campervan converter that specialises in bespoke VW Transporters – with an emphasis on quality

Words **Iain Duff**



The Vanlord UK team

Like many others, the Vanlord UK story started in 2022 at the height of the post-Covid campervan boom.

Company co-founder and Managing Director, Drew Zablockis, began his campervan business journey at a local garage, where he built his very first 'van. It was during this hands-on experience that he realised how popular the campervan industry had become in the UK. And it was that growing demand for personalised, adventure-ready vehicles that sparked him to take the leap and turn his passion into a business. From that first build, Drew knew he was onto something special, and that's how Vanlord UK was born.

With a background rooted in the leisure industry, Drew splits his time between working with the tools and driving the business forward with new projects. Describing himself as obsessed with quality, he is still the ultimate QC for all 'vans that bear the Vanlord logo.

Co-founder, Henry Qu, has more than 30 years of high-level business experience and it's his role to make sure the resources are available to keep pushing the limits and help guide Vanlord's growth.

Three years later, Vanlord has a premises in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, and produces 120 to 150 builds a year. It specialises in bespoke VW Transporter conversions but it has come a long way since that first "lovely red Transporter" was built back in 2022.

Paul Hinchliffe. Chief Operating Officer, tells us, "Our first campervan build back in 2022 was a bit different, with a simpler set-up and not as many advanced features as we can offer to our customers now. It was more back to basics, but we still focused on creating a great experience.

"It was a perfect entry-level 'van to start with. It laid the perfect foundation for learning and experimenting, and even without all the high-tech upgrades, it offered an amazing experience, perfecting the best, most uncompromised layout. That first build will always have a special place with us, it paved the way for all the developments we've made since then!"

Paul, who has 25 years' experience in the motorcycle industry followed by five years running a large motorhome and caravan business, joined as Chief Operating Officer last year with the goal of developing strategies to find new routes to market and put customers first.

And that "customer first" approach is what drives everything that Vanlord does. The aim with every vehicle is to bring the customer's dream to life. The company's motto is "We believe the journey should feel just as incredible as the destination".

"Each 'van is so individual, almost with an identity and a life of its own," Paul explains. "Each 'van is designed for that particular customer's needs. We have built some very special 'vans recently, but we don't operate with a range as such. It's all super-high spec bespoke builds. Our main conversions start from around £17k and features pretty much everything you could want in a 'van."

So, as far as Vanlord is concerned, what makes a great campervan conversion?

Well, according to Paul, it's a build that doesn't just match, but surpasses the customer's vision. It's also got to be practical – so it should fit in a car park space, for example.

Basically, Vanlord wants to remove anything that could stop the owner from simply grabbing the keys and going for a long weekend away at a moment's notice.

Paul said, "It's such a 'pure freedom machine'; the thought of the totally unhindered possibility of going to the Peak District for a couple of nights at the drop off a hat is exactly what we aim to deliver. As long as you have the time then we can supply the options you need."

Customers are encouraged to get

themselves heavily involved at every stage of the build process. They have a choice in materials, colours, stitching, wheels, styling, etc. The Vanlord UK samples box allows customers to make relaxed decisions at home while they enjoy a glass of wine or two. "The customer passion and enthusiasm drives us to make the best 'van possible," says Paul.

That commitment to delivering exactly what a customer wants can result in some unusual builds. One of the most extraordinary was the request for a high-end sound system and disco light set-up which effectively turned the campervan into a party venue on wheels.

The campervan was upgraded with premium speakers, subwoofers and amplifiers, with high-end looms for exceptional clarity and power. Paul adds, "We incorporated noise-cancelling insulation and strategically positioned the components to create rich, immersive sound, transforming every journey into a concert on wheels. The result was crystal-clear audio, perfect for any adventure."

How does Vanlord aim to stand out in what is a crowded market? "We prioritise quality over quantity," says Paul, "ensuring that each conversion is meticulously designed for practical use. Our commitment to quality is fairly obvious through the use of high-quality brands and 100% approved components. We operate a hassle-free warranty, and thorough inspections by experienced technicians to guarantee that each 'van is fully serviced and ready to meet the demands of day-to-day life."

With so many converters out there competing for our business, it can be difficult to know which company is right for you.

Vanlord says research is the key.

Paul warns, "The market is moving fast and conversions range massively in terms of quality. Understand your dealer and what they value. Check the 'van has safety certificates for gas and mains, as well as comprehensive warranties. Read reviews, for that is the best place to understand a business/product."

Information

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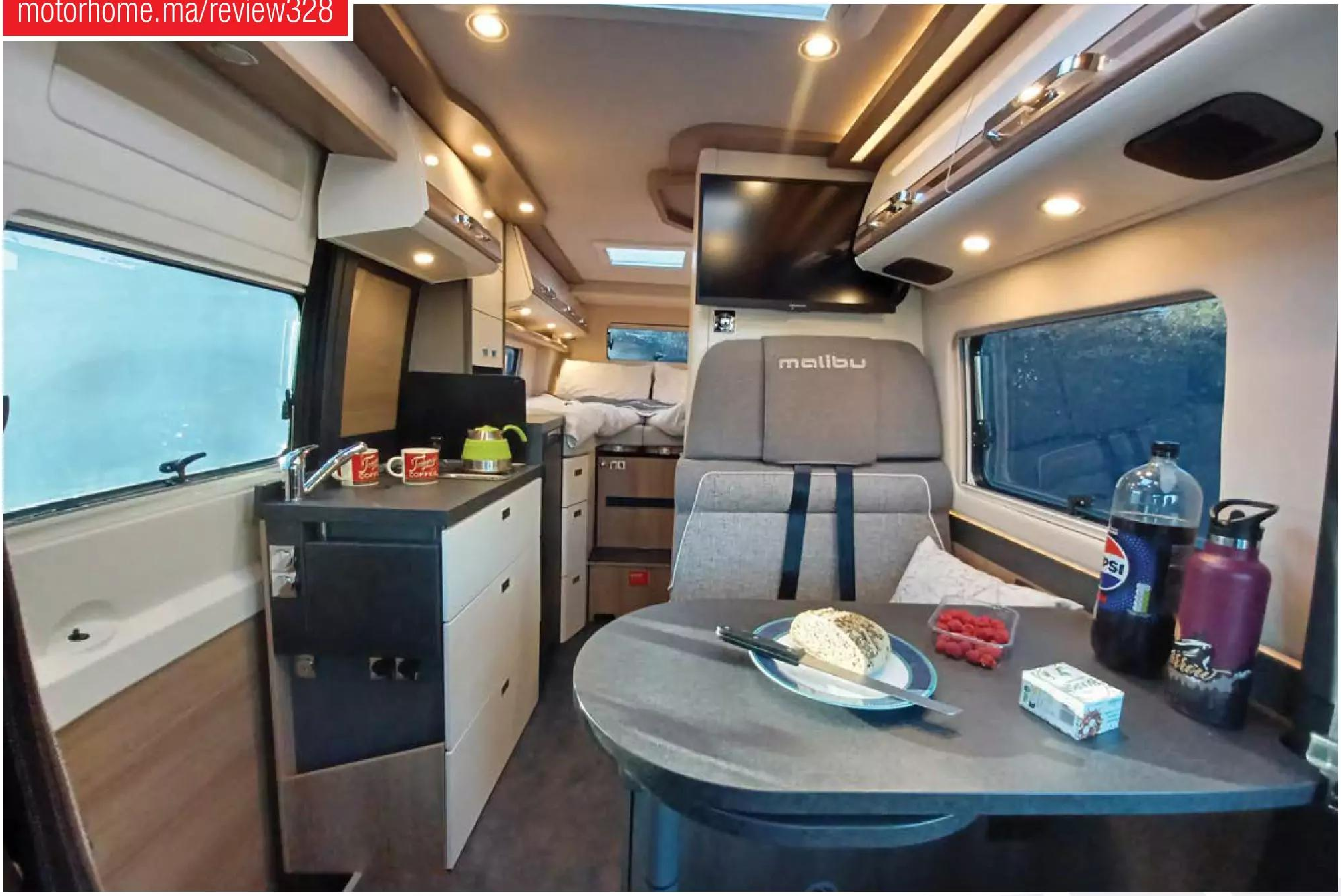
REVIEWED

MALIBU GENIUS 641 LE

Carthago Group's campervan brand makes a mid-sized Mercedes, because short is too short and long is too long...

Words & pictures ▌ Peter Vaughan

WATCH THE VIDEO
motorhome.ma/review328



PROS

- Rear extension with garage (and it looks so well integrated)
- Superb rear bedroom with room to sit up

CONS

- Can't open kitchen drawers with the room divider in use
- Needed a little more legroom on the loo

This is the most talked about new 'van of the 2025 season. It was the star of last September's Caravan Salon Düsseldorf and it has now been crowned Campervan of the Year. It's called Genius which, for once, might not be overstating things too much.

So what's all the fuss about? Put simply, Malibu (Carthago's sub-brand that builds all of its campervans) has added a GRP pod onto the rear of an L2 Mercedes-Benz Sprinter van, taking it from 5.93m to 6.40m long. It isn't the first company to do something like this (Dehler, followed by Karmann and then Auto-Sleepers did similar in the 1990s on VW T4s) but the execution here is so good that it looks like a product of Mercedes itself. And, this time, there is a very good reason for it.

Single bed layouts are incredibly popular throughout Europe, both in motorhomes and campervans. It's a format that sells like *heisse kuchen* in Fiat's extra-long (6.36m) panel van, but can't really be squeezed into the shorter Merc. It can be found in the L3 Sprinter but, at 6.97m long, that's just too unwieldy for most buyers. So, with no 'right size' van coming direct from the home of the three-pointed star, Malibu has made its own.

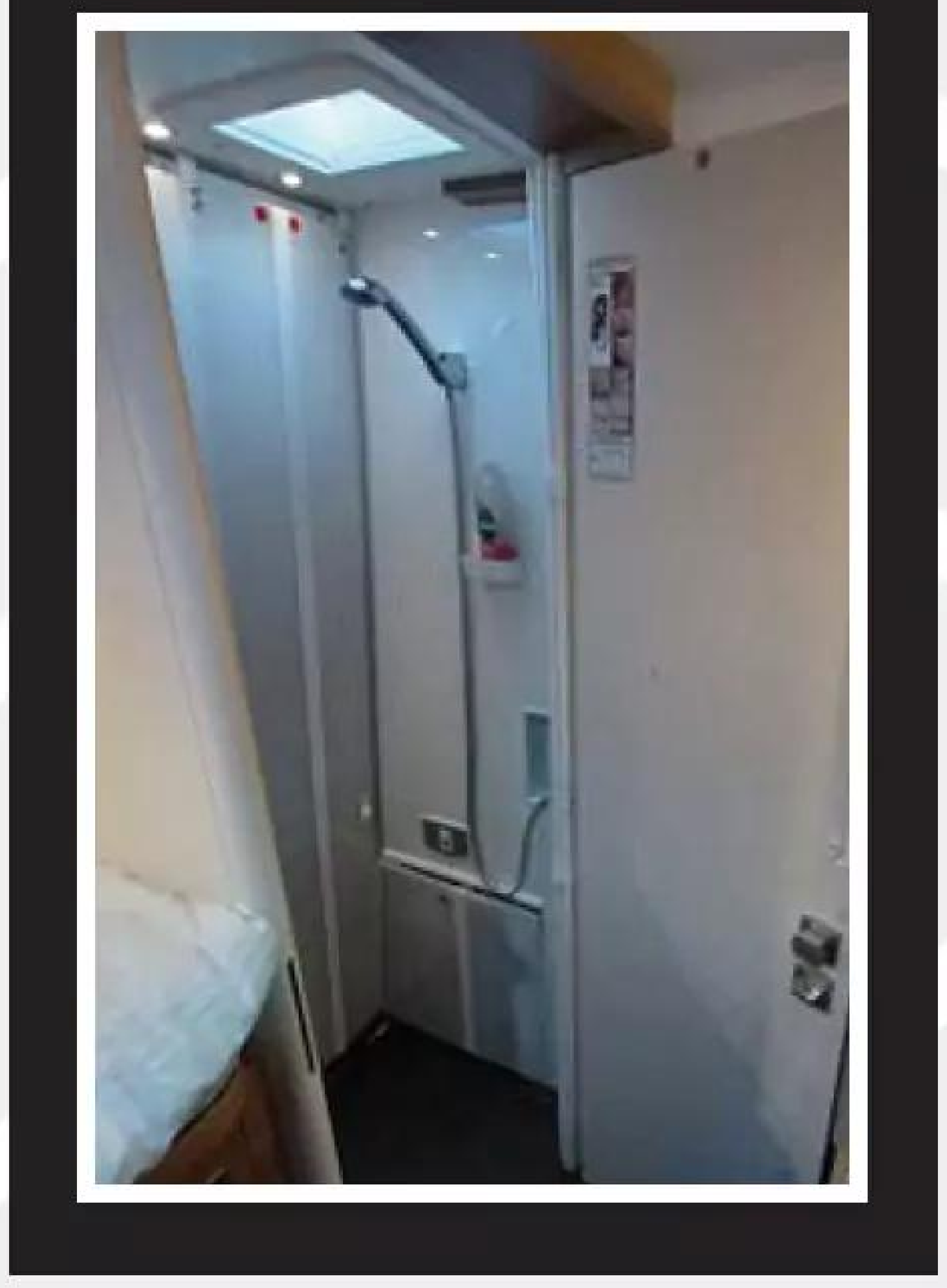
BUILDING AN EXTENSION

Malibu's rear extension replaces the barn doors of the Sprinter van with a one-piece sandwich construction GRP shell featuring "extra protect" insulation and removing thermal bridges from the bedroom area. The company has gone to great lengths to merge it with the Mercedes bodywork, so you won't immediately notice where one starts and the other stops. You can have it in a choice of colours, too – white is standard, with silver, grey or black as options (£2,625 extra).

From the rear it actually improves both the looks and practicality, with a full-width tailgate (linked to the central locking) lifting to reveal 1,400 litres of storage. Internal width is up to 1.68m, with headroom of 99cm reducing to 85cm further into the load area. Here, furniture on either side incorporates the gas locker and Combi boiler on the nearside, with useful (removable) drawers opposite.

Add the optional floor rails and you're ready for a Pedelec bike rack (£750) or a set of storage boxes (£1,710), each sliding out for loading. For larger or longer items it's possible to hinge up the beds and open the small door that separates the living area from the garage. With so much space available, it's little wonder that Malibu calls this a 'Motorhome Van', saying that the Genius mixes the best of campervan and motorhome worlds.

WITH SO MUCH SPACE, IT'S LITTLE WONDER MALIBU CALLS THIS A 'MOTORHOME VAN' – THE GENIUS MIXES THE BEST OF CAMPERVAN AND MOTORHOME WORLDS



Space, of course, isn't much use without payload and our test 'van had the optional 4,100kg upgrade, resulting in a 915kg carrying capacity. You can have a 3.5-tonne Genius but you'd need to exercise a degree of restraint when ticking the options.

Yes, this is another German 'van where the base price (£85k) can be disregarded and the list of optional extras is a long one. 'Our' Genius was almost £125k, which is likely to be a typical spend (more if you want the 4x4 version, called Genius Performance, which is only available as a 4,100kg vehicle).

PACK IT IN

The five options packs fitted – Chassis, Chassis-Plus, Style, Habitation and Driver's Assistance – account for the majority of the extra cost and weight here (£20,510 and 81.5kg to be precise) and you'll almost certainly want them.

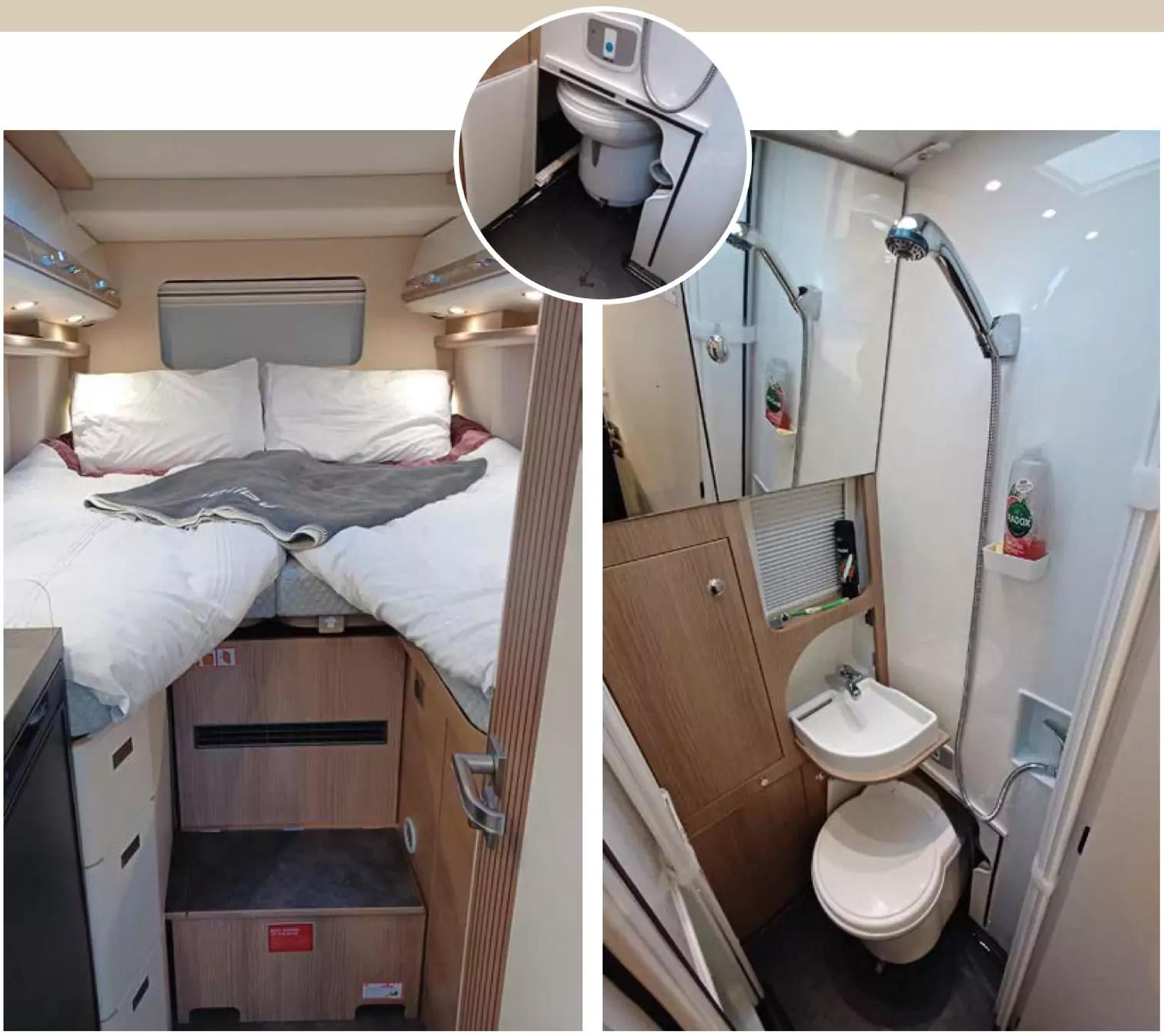
The priciest, the Chassis Pack, includes essentials like the MBUX multimedia system with sat-nav, the electric parking brake, reversing camera, cab blinds, a flyscreen for the door and cab seats upholstered to match the rear.

The Chassis-Plus Pack adds the 170hp motor (150hp is standard) and nine-speed auto gearbox, plus the Thermotronic automatic air-con and 17in alloy wheels. The Style Pack gives you the chromed grille and colour-coded bumper, while the Habitation Pack adds comfort features like the microfibre headlining, ambient lighting and insulated waste tank.

The Driver's Assistance Pack completes the spec with adaptive cruise control, lane departure warning, high beam assist and tyre pressure control.

The only pack not fitted to 'our' Genius was the Self-Sufficiency Pack, which includes two 150Ah lithium batteries and an 1,800W inverter for £5,570 (or £7,315 if you want two 110W solar panels added). But there are plenty more individual extras you can add, both from Mercedes and Malibu.

For example, the heating was upgraded to the Combi 6 E gas/electric unit for £785, but for £1,310 you could have diesel heating instead. The



upholstery here is one of three no-cost fabrics, but part and full leather options are also listed – there are 10 choices in all. A third berth is possible, too, with a kit to convert the lounge. So, you can tailor your Genius to your needs, budget permitting!

The test vehicle also came with a towbar, front fog and cornering lights, high-performance LED headlamps, heated cab seats with electric lumbar adjustment, an awning with exterior lighting, 24in TV (ideally placed for viewing from the cab seats), a soft-closing sliding door and an additional bedroom window.

BACK TO BLACK

In Obsidian Black, with modest graphics, alloy wheels and framed habitation windows, the Genius looked stunning, but I wouldn't choose this colour, either for parking in the summer sun or trying to keep it clean.

However, I'd have absolutely no regrets about this base vehicle spec. From the moment you press the 'engine start' button, engage drive and the electric parking brake automatically disengages, it feels like a premium vehicle. The MBUX's clear display for radio and navigation still impresses and the seats are super-supportive, with the benefit of tilt adjustment and extendable squabs for taller drivers.

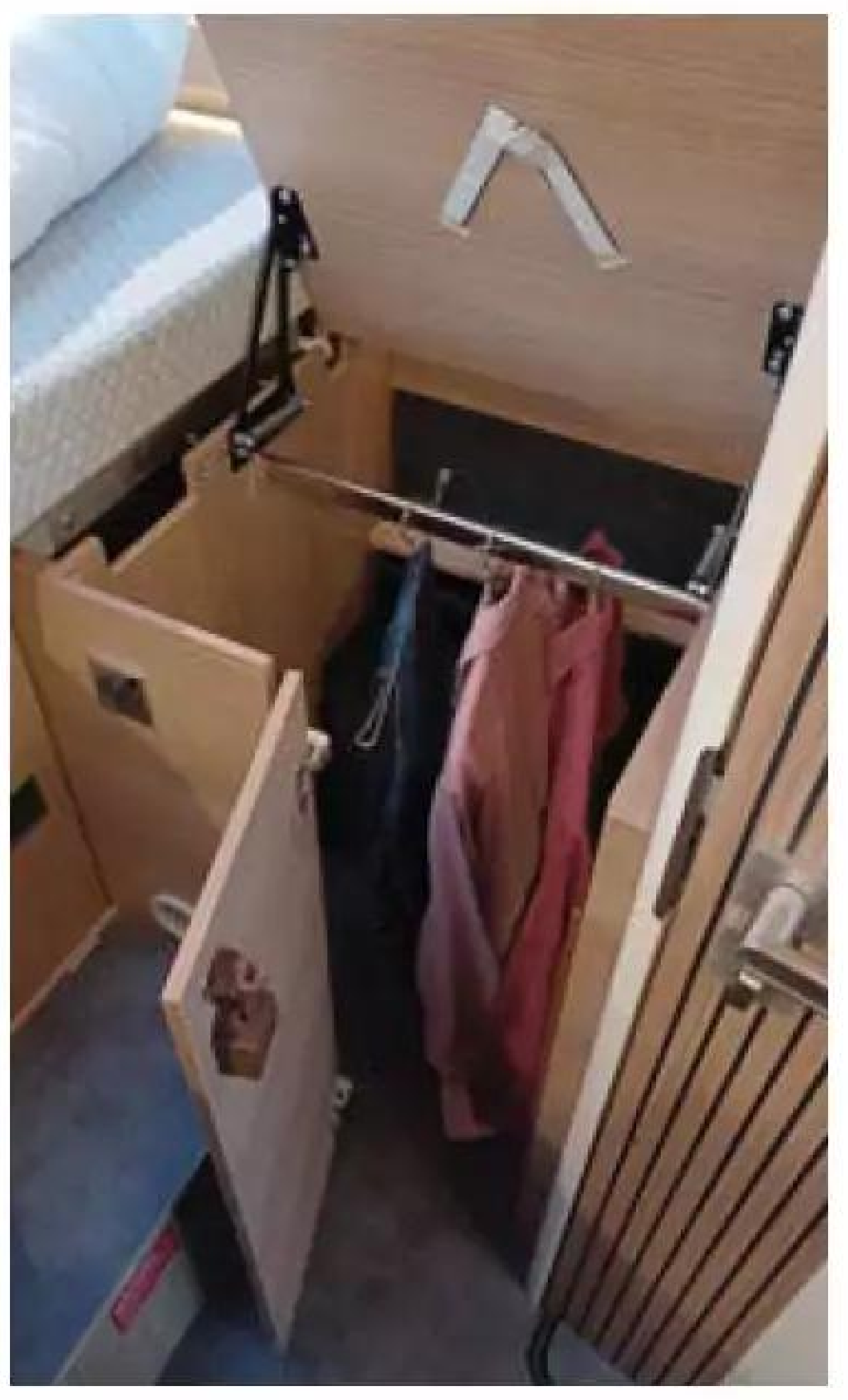
When manoeuvring, the modest wheelbase and rear-wheel drive make this Genius feel smaller than it is, while the three different views offered by the rear view camera are a further boon. Then, on the road, it's simply a pleasure to drive, with smooth, quiet and effortless performance – and a dearth of habitation area squeaks and rattles. It's hardly surprising that Malibu wanted to base its flagship campervan on a Sprinter.

LONDON CALLING

An electric step (with buzzer instead of auto-retraction) eases access through the large, offside sliding door and you enter a typically continental campervan layout with interior design (called Cherry Style Plus, with London upholstery) that will be wholly familiar to anyone who has owned a Malibu. It's the details – and the quality – that make the difference.

One aspect that has been carried out exceptionally well is the merging of the half-dinette lounge with the cab. The cream soft-touch headlining continues over the front seats (replacing the usual gloomy grey in Merc cabs), while the top lockers not only continue seamlessly but incorporate ambient lighting, too. With sturdy hinges and chromed handles on those top cupboards plus more padded fabric around the side window, you're left in no doubt that this is a premium camper.

There are plenty of downlights, plus a wind-up Heki rooflight for daylight. The sturdy wall-mounted table has an extension leaf to serve the driver's pew and the floor beneath it incorporates some extra storage. Even the shape of the bench's backrest seems well-judged and there's Isofix here, too. A



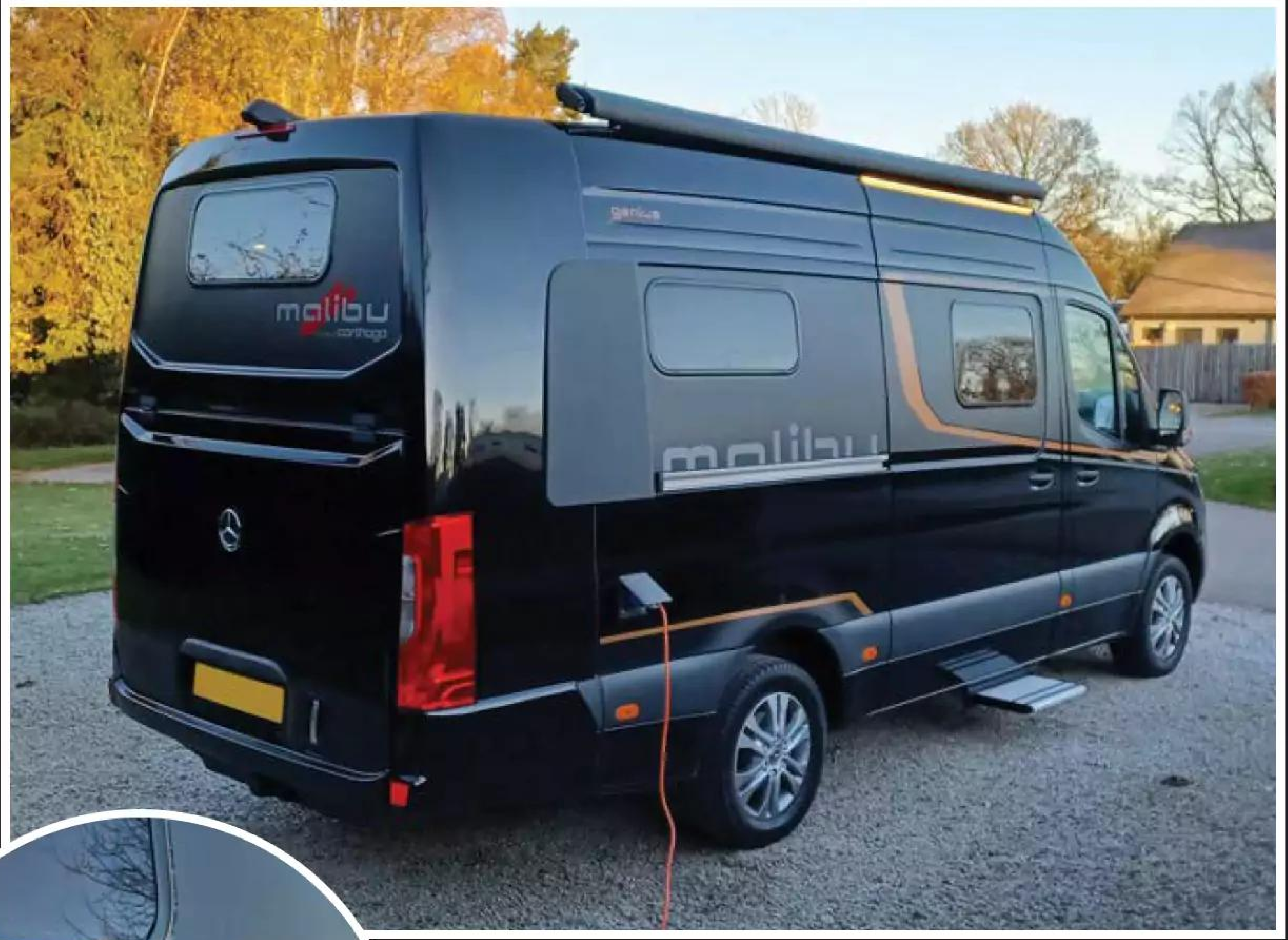
FACT FILE

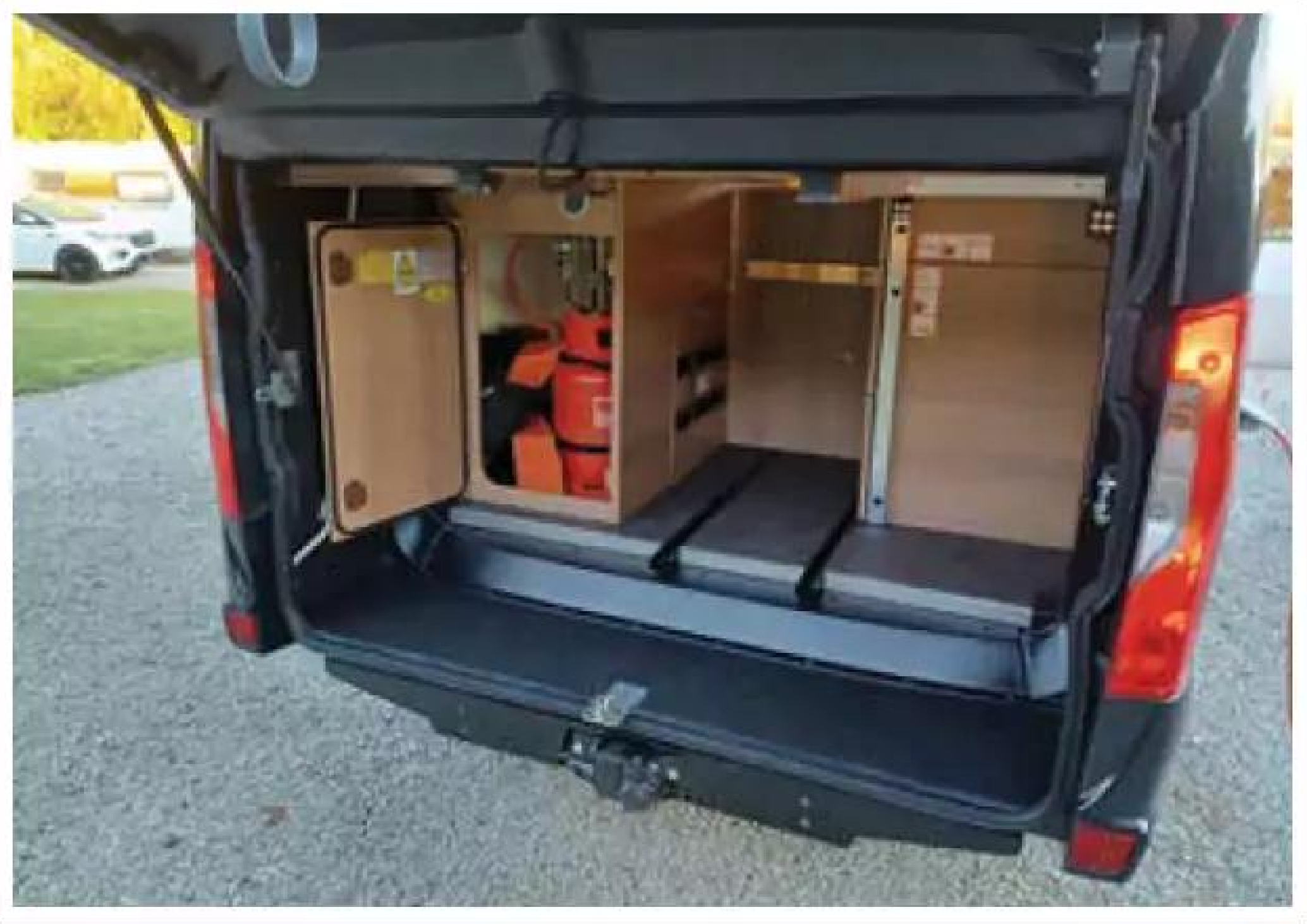
MALIBU GENIUS 641 LE
Price from £85,270
As tested £124,495
Berths 2/3
Travel seats 4
Base vehicle Mercedes-Benz Sprinter
Length 6.40m
Width 2.02m
Height 2.68m
Gross weight 3,500kg (4,100kg as tested)
Payload 554kg (standard spec), 915kg (as tested)
Engine 2-litre, 170hp, rear-wheel drive, nine-speed automatic gearbox (as tested)

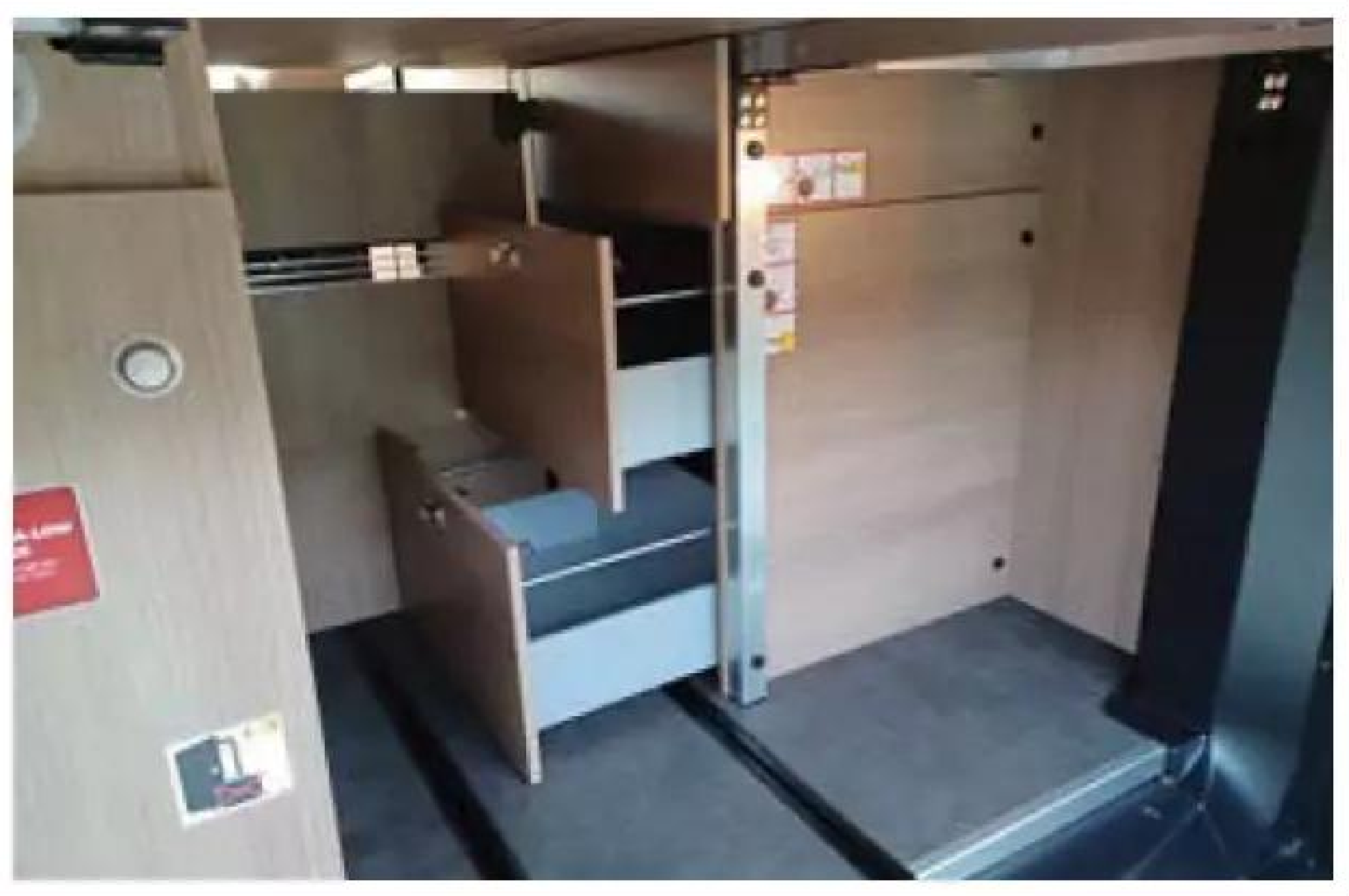
KEY FEATURES
KITCHEN
- Can two-burner hob, push-button ignition
- Thetford 84-litre compressor fridge
- Rear single bed: Nearside 2.03m x 0.90m/0.67m, offside 1.96m x 0.82m/0.63m

- 100-litre fresh water tank (inboard)
- 90-litre waste water (underslung, insulted – heating optional)
- Space/water heating: Truma Combi 6 E gas/230V blown-air (optional upgrade)
- Gas: 2 x 11kg
- Leisure battery: 90Ah (lithium)

OPTIONS
Fitted to test vehicle: Many, including 4,100kg chassis (£1,485), towbar (£1,185), black paint (£2,625), awning (£1,170), 24in LED TV (£1,285), Chassis Package (£9,990), Chassis Plus Package (£6,420), Habitation Package (£2,010), Driver's Assistance Package (£1,220)







malibu
a company of carthago

VERDICT

Sometimes, picking the Campervan of the Year is easy and never has a winner been any more obvious than this year with the Malibu Genius. Here are all the things we like about the Malibu campervan range, combined with the premium, rear-wheel drive Mercedes base vehicle. It's just that Malibu had to create its own unique size of Sprinter van to make this possible!

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motorhome.ma/QuoteInfo

drawer under the half-dinette adds practical storage.

Then, opposite, more drawers offer the most practical use of space in the galley. Worktop isn't huge but, with the split sink cover, flip-up extension at the forward end, plus a raised area over the fridge, there's sufficient. What you won't find, even on the options list, is an oven but, if you can't cook your favourite dishes on a two-burner hob, consider carrying a Remoska or perhaps an air fryer – you'll have plenty of room for either.

The fridge is an 84-litre compressor model and the fact that it's not a full-height unit allows the through-view to the bedroom that makes the Genius feel more spacious. Then there are yet more drawers under the foot of the bed (the lowest one incorporating a bin). And those extra drawers in the garage area can be reached, too, by simply opening the door between the beds. You won't be short of space for all your gear.

MAXED OUT

We've seen the 'two rooms' concept before in Malibu's Fiat-based First Class models but it works well here, too. The washroom door opens round, then locks against the kitchen before a hinged panel completes the separation between the lounge and bedroom. Our only criticism is that the washroom light switch is on the wrong side of the partition – oh, and the kitchen drawers can't open with that room divider in use.

Again, Malibu has used a slide-away toilet before, but the washbasin that swings down from the side wall is a new design. What they both achieve is a lot more space for showering and even better is the folding screen that extends the cubicle beyond the toilet door. Malibu calls it the Supermax bathroom and it is indeed a bigger, better shower than you'd normally expect in a campervan. There's not the same space when it comes to legroom on the loo, but it should be adequate for most folk.

However, where the extra length of the Genius really shows is in the bedroom. Here, a single step (hiding a little more storage) provides access to two comfortable single beds that share the full width of the campervan along most of their length. And these are long beds, the cold foam mattresses measuring 2.03m on the nearside and 1.96m on the offside. There are top cupboards along each side but, with nothing at the head of the bed, there's plenty of room to sit up.

You can charge your phones with convenient USB ports on either side, plus shelves for devices, specs, etc. And on a hot night you can benefit from opening windows on three sides as well as a roof vent above.

I didn't get to try that as it was minus six overnight on the Knaresborough Caravan and Motorhome Club site – not that I really noticed until seeing the thick frost on the bonnet in the morning. Heat from the Combi is distributed right around the bedroom and under the nearside bed is a storage area directly over the boiler – perfect for the next day's clothes.

The 100-litre fresh water tank is inboard for proper winterisation, while the 90-litre waste tank is underslung but thoroughly insulated (it survived minus six). Additional heating for the grey tank is available as a £925 option.

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REVIEWED

WEINSBERG X-PEDITION 600 MQ

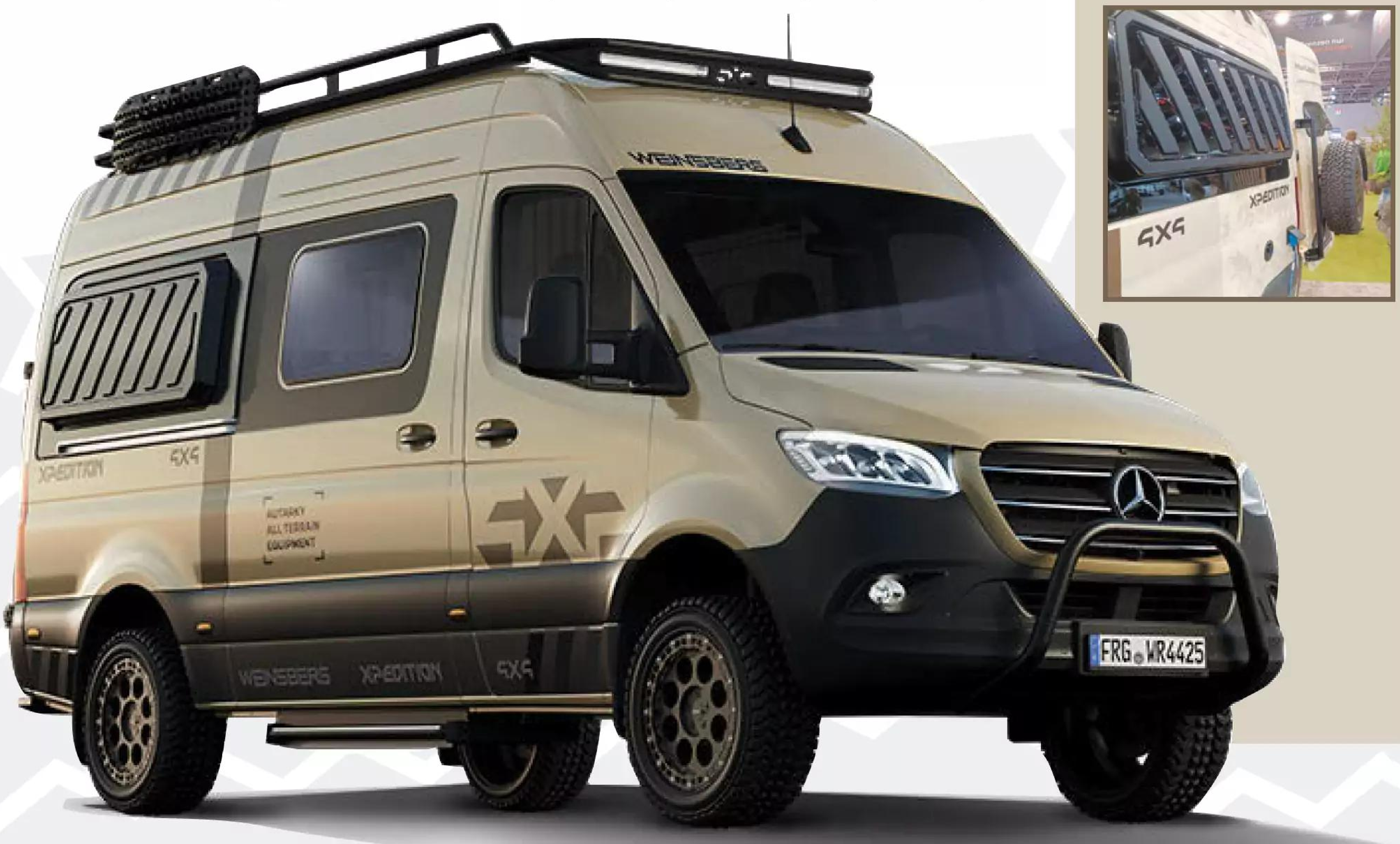
Another manufacturer joins the off-road club...

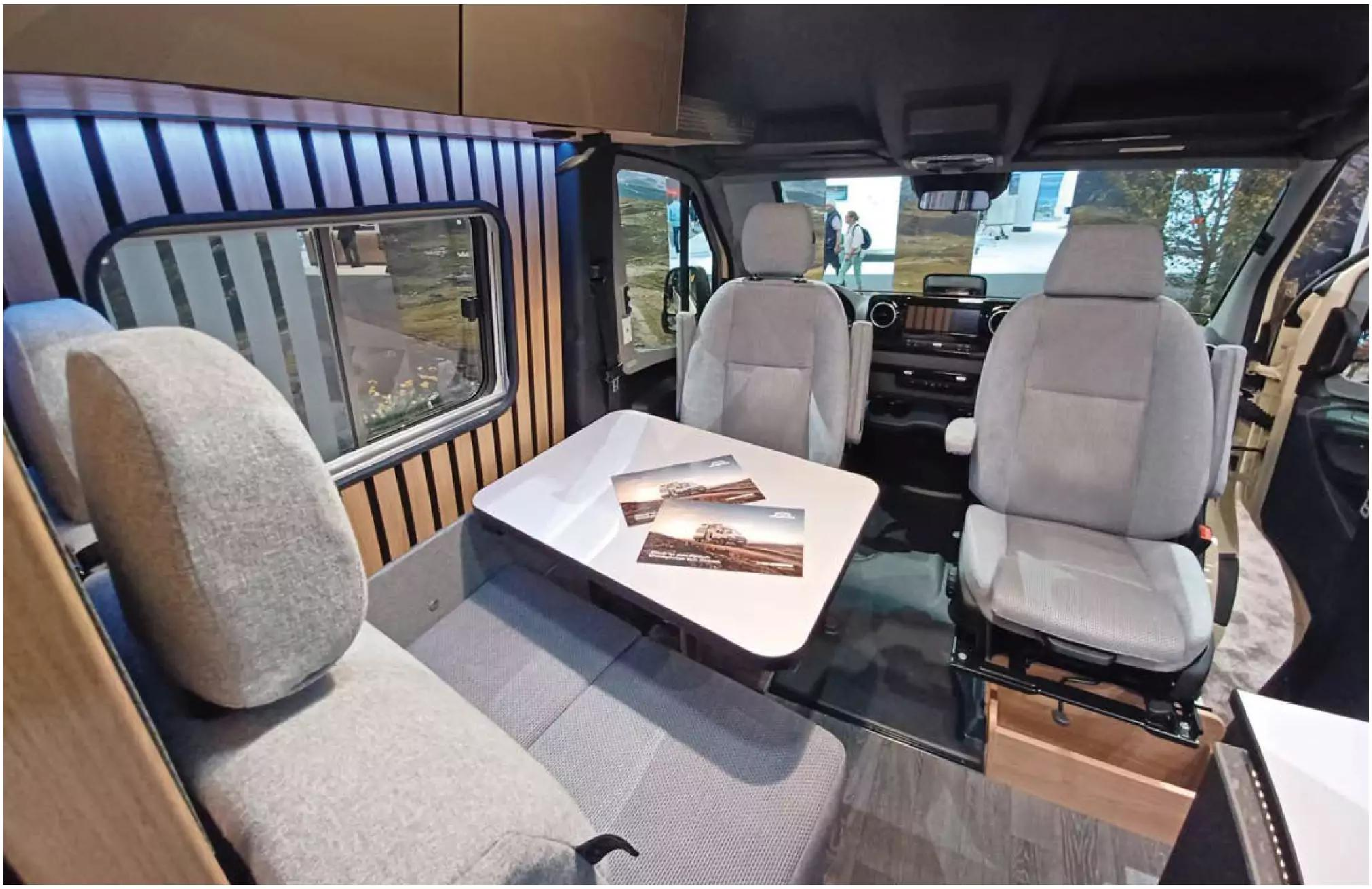
Words & pictures
Peter Vaughan

If there has been a trend in new campervans over the last 12 months, it is four-wheel drive vehicles, which now feature not just from specialist brands but many of the mainstream makers, too. One of the newcomers in this off-road arena is Weinsberg with its new Mercedes Sprinter-based X-Pedition.

We attended the launch of this 'van in Germany last summer and it was certainly a glitzy affair.

The X-Pedition looks the part with its 85mm suspension lift and chunky 245/75 R 16 all-terrain tyres and it comes with the 190hp motor and nine-speed automatic transmission as standard, along with stop/start, Crosswind Assist, Blind Spot Assist, Hill Start Assist and Active Brake Assist. The dashboard comes with Mercedes' 10.25in MBUX display for navigation, radio, etc, and the parking package includes a 360-degree camera. Deep Black is the standard paint colour but you can also specify (at extra cost) Selenite Grey, earthy Moss Grey or





BFGoodrich
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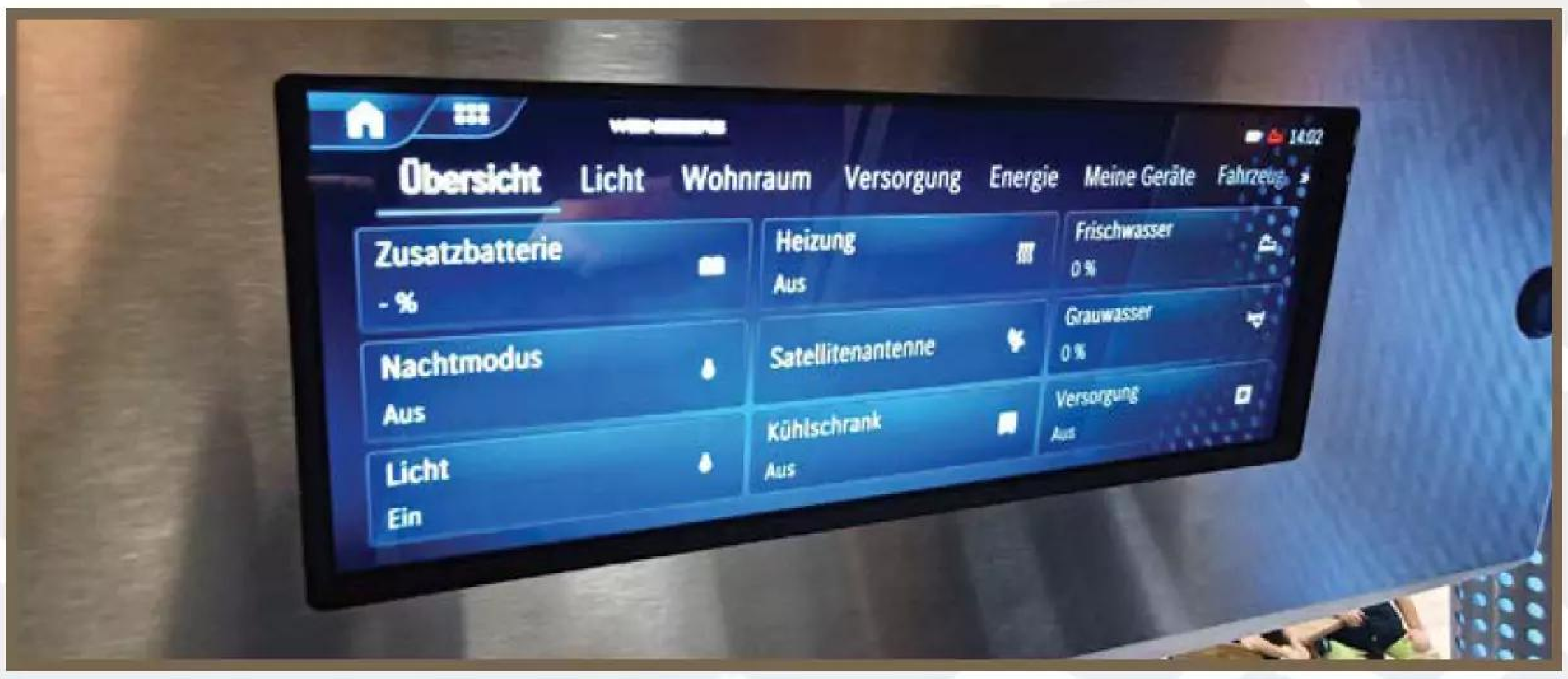

Zusatzbatterie
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Nachtmodus
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Licht
Ein

Heizung
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Satellitenantenne

Kühlschrank
Aus

Frischwasser
0 %

Grauwasser
0 %

Versorgung
Aus

sandy Light Ivory, which we think really suits the vehicle. The front bumper is unpainted and wheels are steel – both features for practicality – while a front bull bar suits the aesthetics. The habitation windows are the premium framed type from Seitz and the side pods that increase interior width for the rear bedroom have an unusual slashed motif. A roof rack with light bar is fitted and the spare wheel sits on the left rear door and an optional lockable storage box is mounted on the right, making the Sprinter a little longer at 6.30m overall.

Open the barn doors and you'll find a large garage area (including the outside shower and gas locker) under the rear transverse double bed that can also be accessed from inside the vehicle. The mattress here is on a slatted base that slides back to give you more room in the kitchen and a Roman blind ensures that your bedroom can retain some privacy when the doors are opened.

Inside, Weinsberg describes the X-Pedition as mixing adventure with luxury. It's certainly a little different to your typical campervan with the Nogal Mediterraneo furniture featuring bold vertical wood panelling strips that are said to improve noise insulation. The ambient lighting can also be changed to suit your mood – pick from aurora, rainbow, campfire and spring awakening colour schemes!

The layout – there's just one 600 MQ floorplan, for now at least – is less of a shock but it does have some different details. The half-dinette bench seat is

WHO IS WEINSBERG?

Weinsberg built its first campervan in 1969 and was taken over by caravan manufacturer, Tabbert, in 1992, subsequently becoming part of the Knaus Tabbert Group in 2003.

Today it offers everything from panel vans to A-classes, all at a slightly lower price point than for equivalent Knaus vehicles. The campervan range includes CaraBus and

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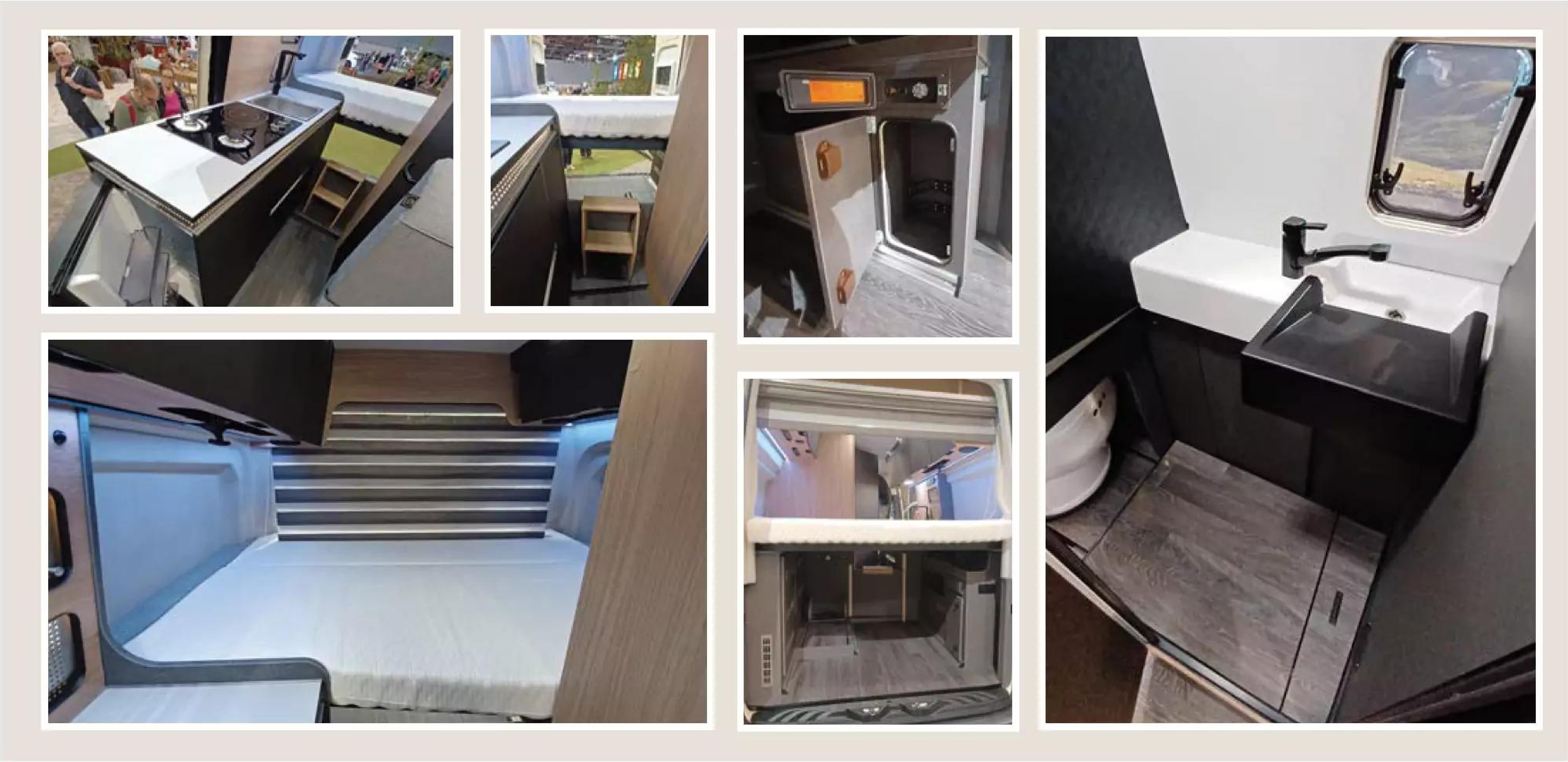


not at 90 degrees to the side wall, but instead angled slightly to improve access and the impression of space. It has Isofix for one child seat and can be extended to give extra shoulder room. The table is free-standing rather than wall-mounted, so it can also be used outside.

The kitchen has its 90-litre compressor fridge mounted at the forward end and its door opens either way, so you can easily reach a Pils whether you're inside the camper or outside. There's a surprisingly generous amount of worktop here and the hob includes two gas rings and one induction. Both the drawers and top cupboards have soft-closing mechanisms.

Aluminium highlights add a designer touch to the galley but it's the Ergoflex washroom that is one of the X-Pedition's most notable features. This is one of the first vehicles to have the Knaus Tabbert Group's award-winning CleanFlex toilet as standard. Using bags in place of chemicals, this greatly enhances your ability to stay off-grid for longer periods, while the loo also slides away into the garage area to create more room for showering (with a folding washbasin further increasing space).

Diesel heating, a lithium leisure battery and a 120-litre fresh water tank are further pluses when you're off-grid. For once, this is a German campervan with a short options list, too, although you may wish to add both the Mercedes Package and Weinsberg Smart Package.

FACT FILE

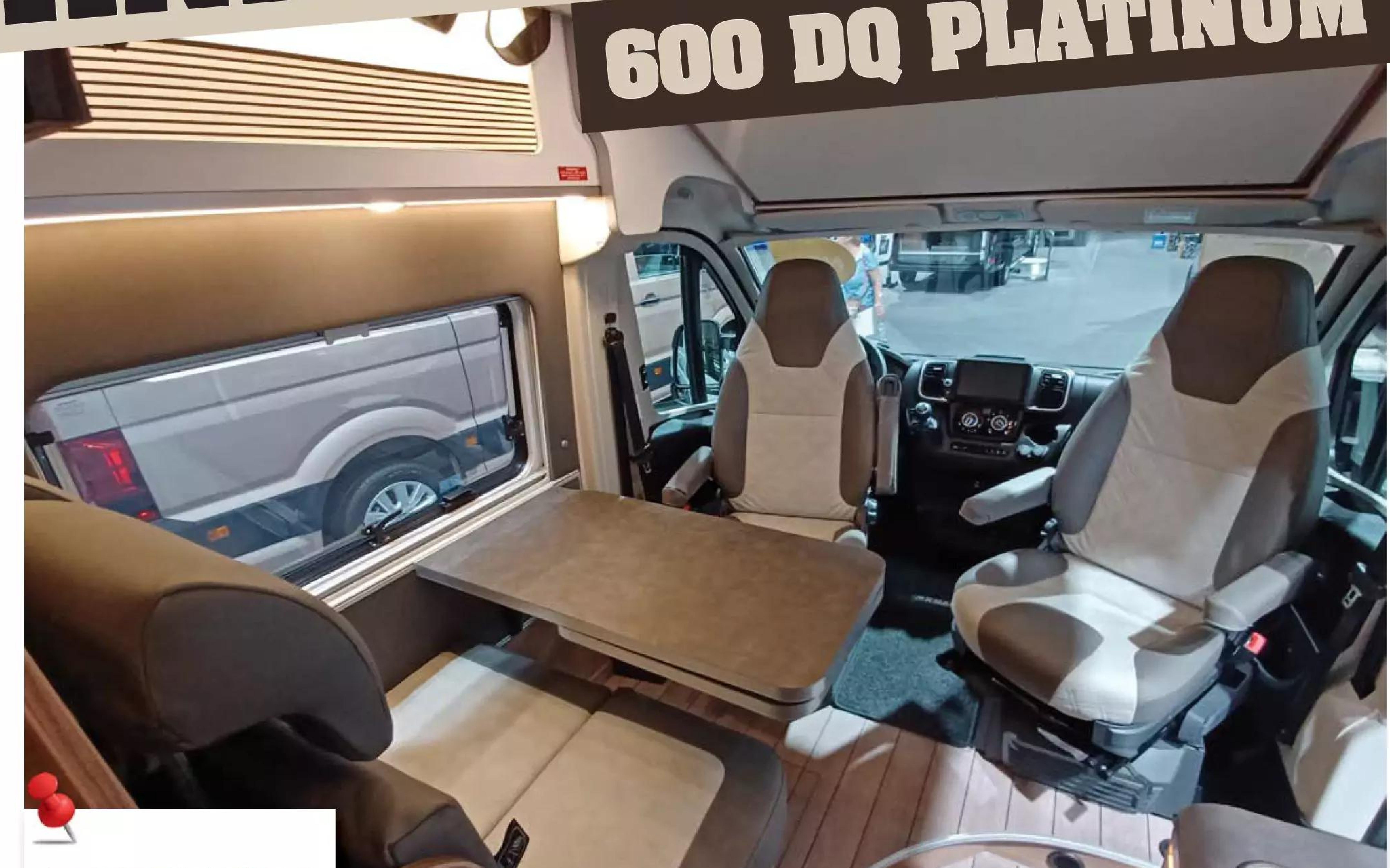
WEINSBERG X-PEDITION 600 MQ
Base vehicle Mercedes Sprinter
Price from £108,454 (RWD), £113,125 (4x4)
Berths 2/3
Travel seats 2/4
Length 6.30m
Width 2.06m
Height 2.90m
Gross weight 3,500kg (3,880kg or 4,100kg optional)
Payload 394kg

BUY A WEINSBERG FROM...

Around the UK and Ireland, Weinsberg has 17 dealers. Around England, there's a good spread of outlets, from Adventure Leisure Vehicles and Birkbrow Leisure in the north to Alan Kerr in the southwest. Other English retailers include Davan Caravans, Premium Motorhomes and SMC.

In Northern Ireland, it is represented by Lisburn Caravan Centre, while south of the border it's Anchor Point Motorhomes. In Scotland, you'll find Weinsberg at Calder Campers.

REVIEWED KNAUS BOXLIFE 600 DQ PLATINUM



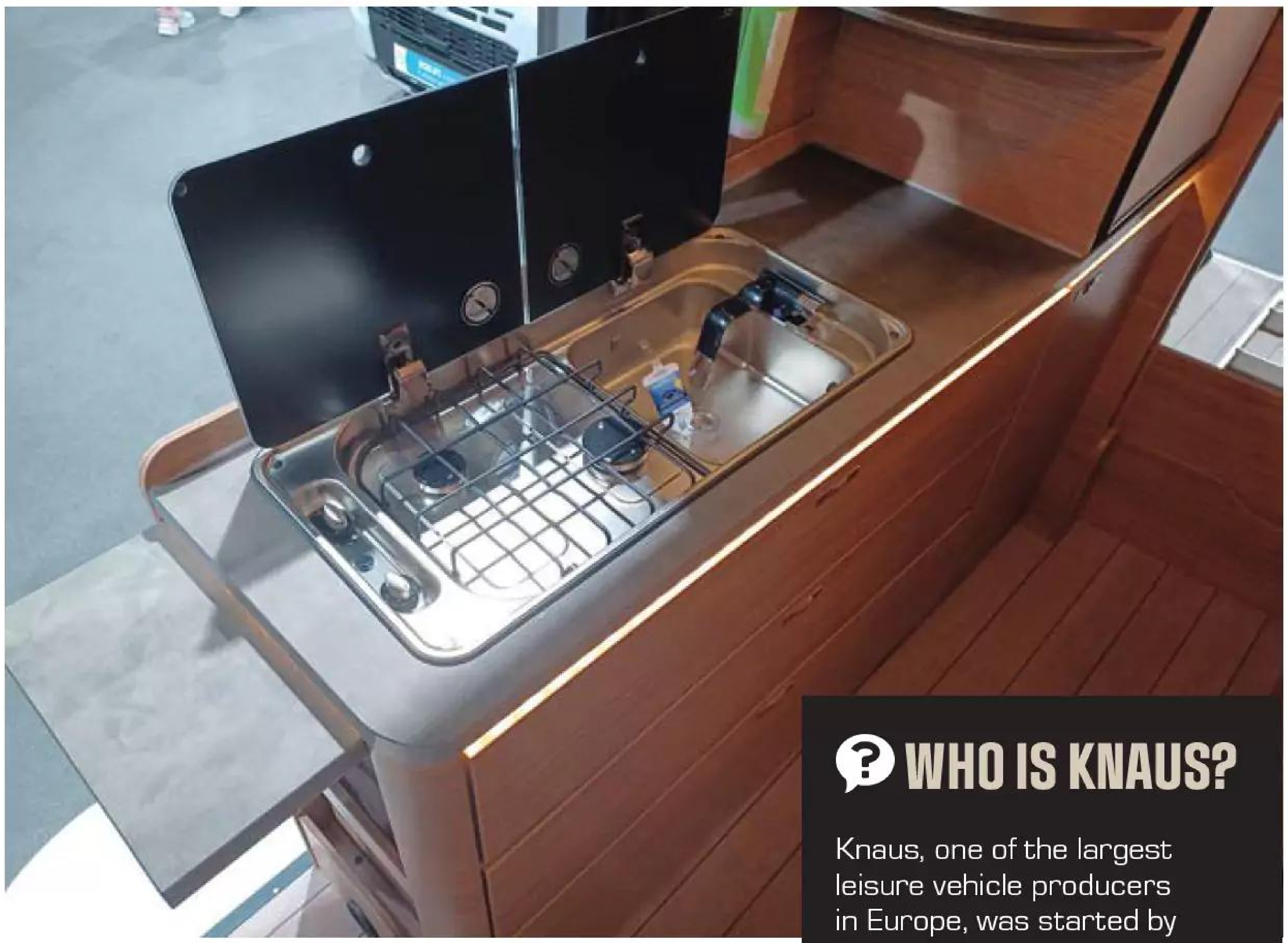
Four berths without a pop-top in this clever campervan

Words
Peter Vaughan

On the face of it, this looks like another one of those continental campervans with a fixed bed at the back, a half-dinette at the front and a washroom and kitchen in the middle. Same old, same old. But hold on a minute...

Most campervans of this ilk are really two-berths in terms of sleeping accommodation with four travel seats for a bit more versatility, then perhaps the possibility of turning the dinette into an extra bed for a grandchild who might (a) have to be pre-teens in terms of size or (b) able to sleep without complaint on a mattress with more ridges than the Dolomites.

The answer if you need a true four-berth in this



class of campervan is usually to add a pop-top, at an extra cost of four grand or more. Great in the summer, with all that ventilation in the upstairs den. Not so great in winter with canvas sides.

What if you could get all four berths within the cosy confines of the fully insulated camper bodywork instead? Well, this BoxLife isn't unique in this regard, but it is a rare exception. And better still, it manages the four-person feat without going to the extra length of the biggest Ducato panel van. The 600 DQ is only 5.99m long – a very manoeuvrable size that could save you money on some ferries, too.

It is, however, based on the tallest version of the Fiat, the H3, at 2.82m high and that extra loftiness makes a useful difference inside because it allows for the fitment of a drop-down bed over the lounge area without compromising headroom when it's stowed. Manually operated, this double bed runs lengthways and has its own roof vent. It even leaves enough room to sit underneath it when lowered – but only just. A ladder is a necessary provision but it's not just left to lie around, it has its own cupboard next to the fridge.

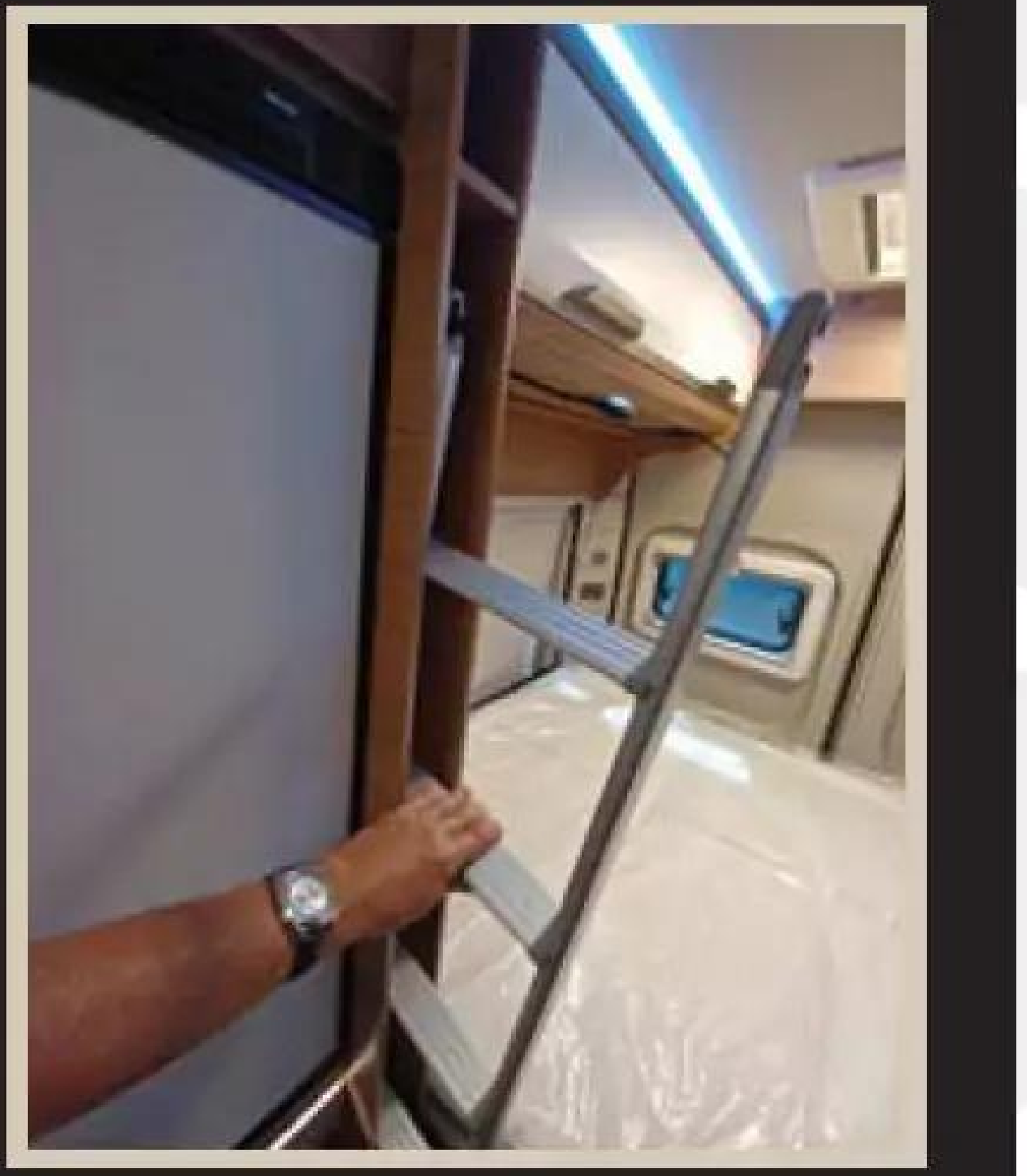
The other bed in this BoxLife is a more typical transverse double in the rear of the campervan, but even this isn't bog standard as it is manually height-adjustable to create more space in the garage below. The bedroom here comes with opening windows in the back doors and on the UK nearside, but a blank wall to sit up against on the offside where there are reading lights. The garage, meanwhile, has lashing points and power points, while the front bulkhead panel can be removed for long loads.

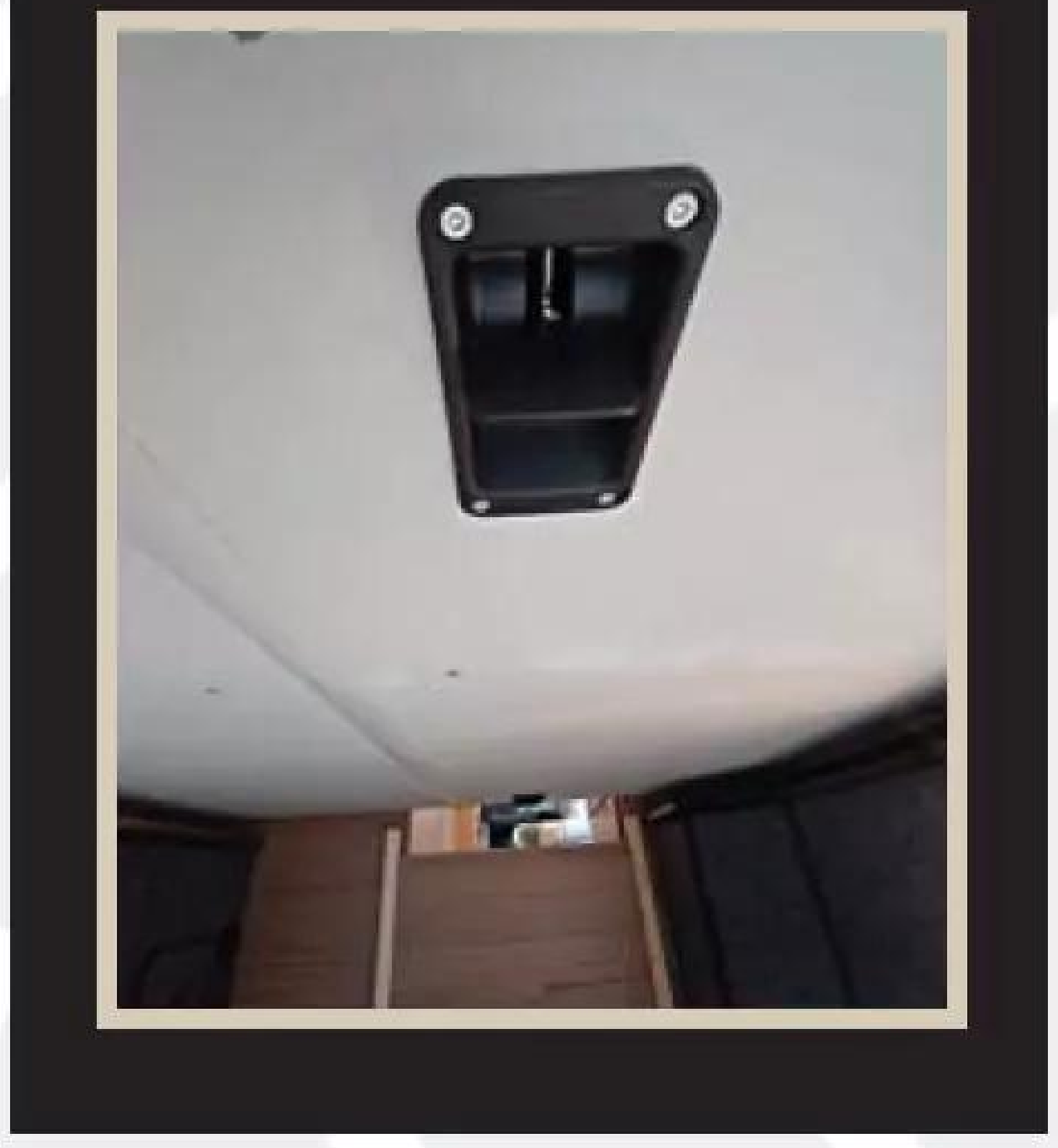
There's more neat design in the front lounge, where the wall-mounted table doesn't have a leg to get in the way. And the rear bench seat has automotive head restraints, Isofix and a 'Comfort function' – seats that can slide apart for extra shoulder room.

Opposite, the galley looks fairly standard but has three supersized drawers, a worktop extension flap and useful hooks for your tea towels. The 90-litre fridge is mounted at waist-height for easy access, as well.

? WHO IS KNAUS?

Knaus, one of the largest leisure vehicle producers in Europe, was started by Helmut Knaus when he built his first caravan, the Schwalbennest in 1960. The company HQ at Jandelsbrunn in Bavaria was founded a decade later and in 1988 came the first motorhome, an overcab coachbuilt called simply Traveller. A-class vehicles followed in 1996 and campervans from 2003. Always innovative, in 2022 the Tourer CUV combined a VW T6.1 motorhome with a campervan-like low height. Its Cleanflex toilet won the Out & About Live Innovation Award in 2025.





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The washroom is Knaus' compact version with the inconvenience of a shower curtain, but other than that it impresses with an opening window, twin shower drains, a fixed basin and modern design. There are good-sized water tanks, too – 102 litres fresh, 90 litres waste.

The base vehicle here is the Maxi version of the Ducato with the 140hp motor, Campovolo Grey paintwork, alloy wheels with all-weather tyres, leather steering wheel, cab blinds, ESP, Hill Holder, Traction Plus and reversing camera.

And the comprehensive spec of this Platinum Selection version doesn't end there. Heating is provided by Truma's 6kW diesel with a 230V element for when you're hooked up. Even the 3.75m roll-out awning is included in the price, which saves nearly £6k compared with a standard model to similar spec.

FACT FILE

KNAUS BOXLIFE 600 DQ PLATINUM SELECTION
Base Vehicle Fiat Ducato
Price from £72,002
Berths 4
Travel seats 4
Length 5.99m
Width 2.05m
Height 2.82m
Gross weight 3,500kg
Payload 667kg

BUY A KNAUS FROM...

Knaus has 12 dealers around the UK, plus one in Ireland (Donegal Motorhomes). In Northern Ireland it is represented by Lisburn Caravan Centre, in Scotland by Calder Campers, and in Wales by Wick Van Centre.

In England, dealers stretch from Adventure Leisure Vehicles in Cumbria and Birkbrow Leisure in Saltburn-by-the-Sea, down to Harbour Creek on Hayling Island and Alan Kerr in Devon. In between are Davan Caravans, Nick Whale, Premium Motorhomes, SMC Motorhomes and Yourstyle Leisure.

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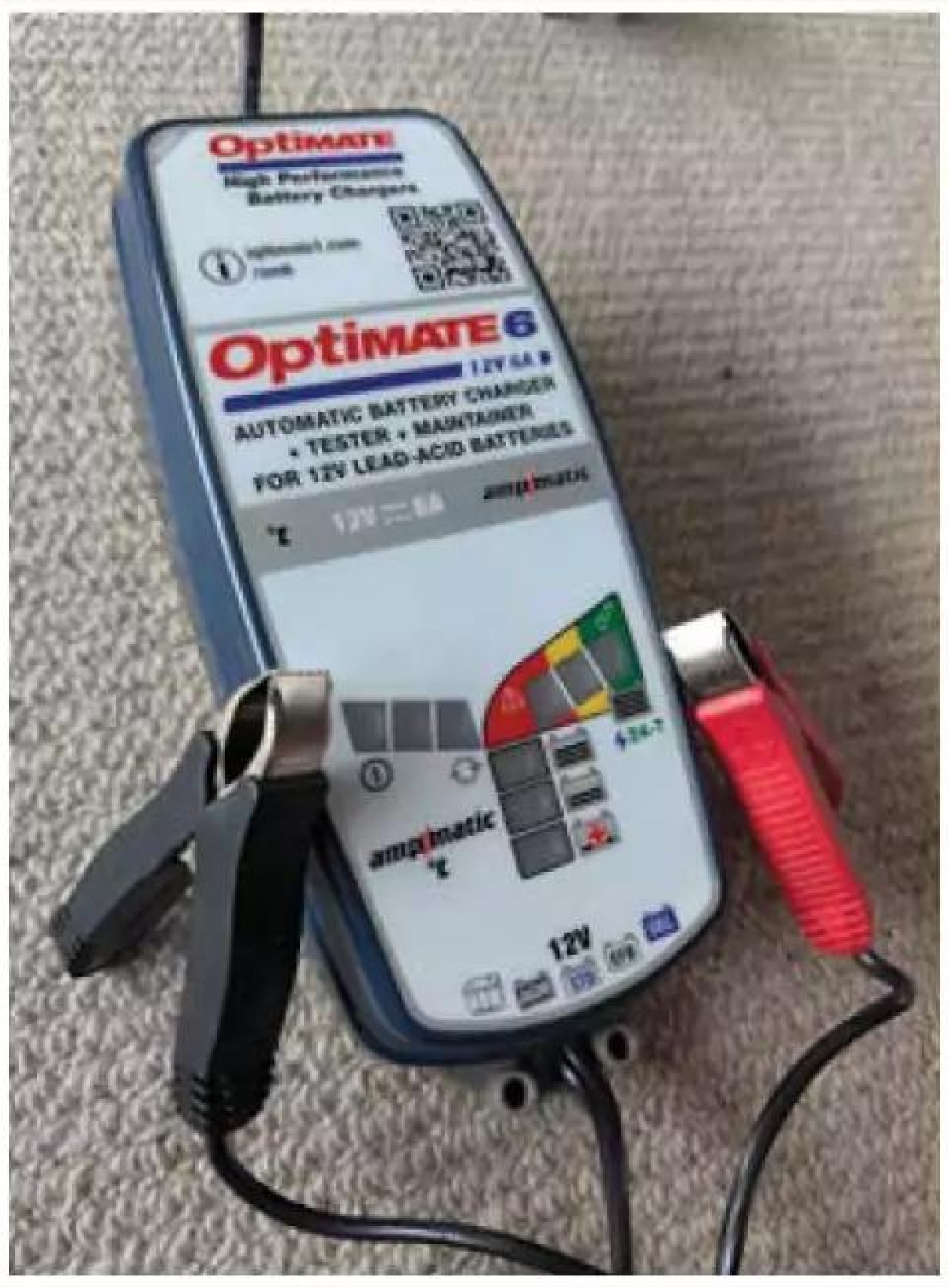
Check out our round-up of the latest campervan and outdoor accessories

OPTIMATE 6 BATTERY CHARGER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12V

Whether you have 12V running through your veins or like to get an expert to change a light bulb, there are some devices that make a job quite easy. OptiMate sells a whole range of battery chargers and testers, including this OptiMate 6 charger.

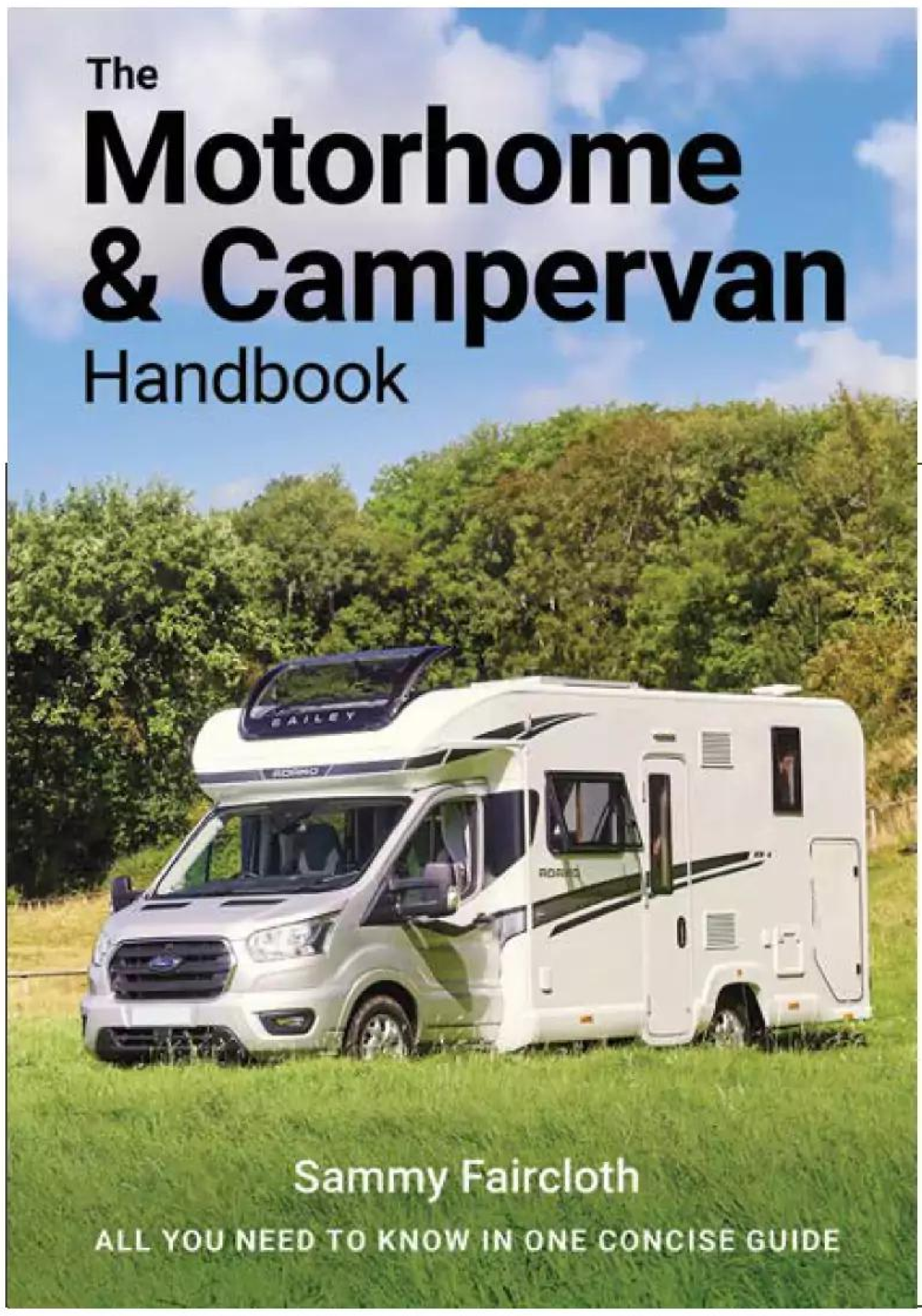
It is part of OptiMate's Silver Series, which means it might be able to restore some batteries (down to 0.5V) as well as charge, optimise and maintain. Bronze-level chargers are designed for maintenance only, while the Gold-level versions have even more features, like retaining settings for when accessories are fitted.

It has a nine-stage charging process, including checking the battery conditions, desulphation and recover if needed and then a bulk charge cycle.

The device then checks the battery again and charges in pulses to make sure all cells are equally charged. Then a series of monitoring and checking phases are delivered, before the charger goes into maintenance mode.

This charger is suitable for all 12V lead acid types, including AGM and gel and can be permanently fixed to an outdoor wall for convenience.

PRICE **£89.90**
W **amzn.to/4gyJ2TM**

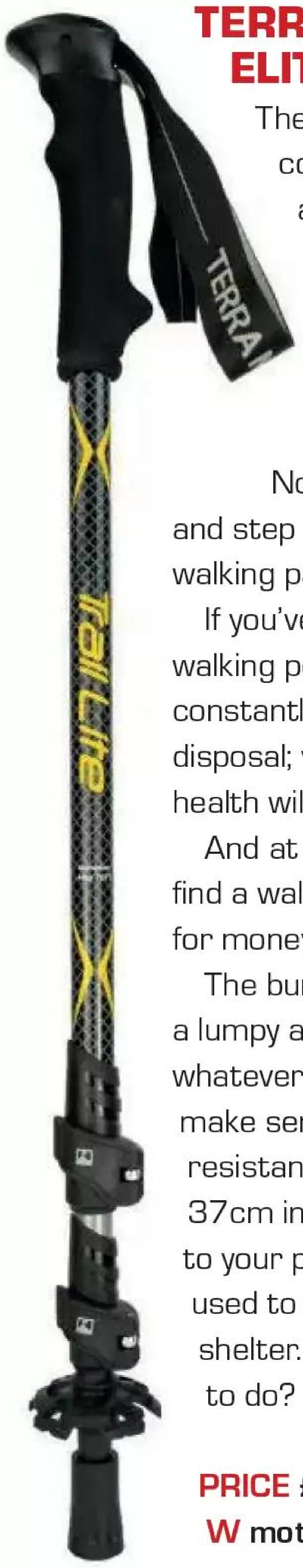


THE MOTORHOME & CAMPERVAN HANDBOOK

For long-standing readers, *The Motorcaravan Manual* will certainly ring a bell, as it is linked to well-known motorhome and campervan writer, the late John Wickersham. His daughter, Sammy Faircloth, has now taken up the mantel and the second version of *The Motorhome & Campervan Handbook* is now available.

As well as a rough overview of motorhomes and campervans, it covers a basic grounding of electrical and water systems in a motorhome. There's handy pictures and information on winterisation, cleaning and toilet servicing, the latter of which is not part of an annual service – if you find a dealer willing to do this for you, they are worth every penny.

PRICE **£25**
W **amzn.to/4jMX078**



TERRA NOVA TRAIL ELITE TREKKING POLE

There's no denying that comfort can make or break a hike and as soon as those aches and pains start to develop, the calls for home time grow ever louder. You can delay those pains with a Terra Nova Trail Elite Trekking Pole and step into a fluid and effortless walking pattern.

If you've never considered a walking pole before, they're a bit like constantly having a handrail at your disposal; your anatomy and long-term health will thank you for it.

And at £40 you'll do very well to find a walking pole with better value for money.

The bumph refers to helping on a lumpy and challenging terrain, whatever that means. What does make sense is the strong, abrasion-resistant design that takes up just 37cm in your bag, adds just 274g to your pack weight, and can also be used to prop up a tarp, if you need shelter. What more does it need to do?

PRICE £40
W motorhome.ma/tnpole

OLPRO 60L HOLDALL

They say if it isn't broken, don't fix it. With an old-school duffel bag design only modernised with waterproof materials, Olpro has considered that perfectly.

And why, may you ask, would a campervanner need a duffel? Well, maybe you need extra clothes storage, or a container for some of your outdoor gear. And the beauty of a duffel is if it's for temporary storage the bag can be compressed and stashed out of the way with ease.

This 60L bag costs £30 and allows you to organise the contents with three different compartments of varying sizes, and the same amount of carrying method variations, too. Misplaced the bag in a dark under-bed cavern? At 70cm in length you'll do well to. In that rare occurrence however, the reflective tree, on the side compartment, is luckily harder to miss in almost all conditions. Every box has been ticked here.

PRICE £30
W motorhome.ma/olproduffel

e-presso
handpresso

HANDPRESSO E-PRESSO PLUS

The previous version of the Handpresso was a great product, and the new e-presso Plus is even better – and more convenient for use on the road. It is just as portable as the original, just as easy to use and can be used with ground coffee or Nespresso capsules.

The e-presso Plus has a rechargeable battery – plug it into in a mains or USB socket and in three hours it should be fully charged, ready to make up to five espressos. It's almost silent in operation, too, so my morning brew needn't wake up my wife or kids.

Now fully portable, the e-presso Plus is small enough to sit in your campervan's cup holder and it's really simple to use. Just pour some water into the clear tank at the top. Then add your ground coffee or Nespresso capsule in the holder that unscrews from the base and you're ready to go. Next, two quick taps on the 'on' button and, after about three minutes, it'll beep to say that it's ready to prepare your coffee. Press the button again and hold until your coffee is of the right size/strength for your preferred taste – a 40ml espresso or 80ml lungo, or anywhere in between.

While some may prefer to use ground coffee, the fact that the e-presso Plus uses Nespresso capsules is a big plus when you're travelling and want a quick caffeine boost without paying exorbitant motorway services prices.

PRICE €149
W handpresso.com

LIFE BEYOND BRICKS

"I vant to be alone"… Tash enjoys some me time as she does her best Greta Garbo impression

I always love to come up with fresh ideas, tips to share and new travels to talk about. Recent chats with friends and followers, however, have reminded me that it can be just as beneficial to revisit things. With the rise in popularity of campervan travel and full-timing, there are always people exploring this hobby/lifestyle for the first time. People who can benefit from others' experience.

With that in mind, I wanted to talk this month about the importance of time alone when travelling as a couple. A friend was recently telling me about her plans to get her own campervan so she can enjoy solo trips like I, and a few of our other friends, do. She has a motorhome that she travels in with her husband but she wants to swap her car for a small camper, just for her, that doubles as a daily driver (just as I talked about in a recent column!).

Having spent a lot more time in the big 'van with my husband in recent months, and the start of our working show season imminent (where we'll be travelling and working together), this got me thinking about how to still have that important time to yourself when you travel together as a couple.

This is my personal opinion, but I believe it is highly important to have time out for yourself, particularly if you are travelling long term or full-timing in a 'van. Even more so when that 'van is your only form of transport. Everything takes a little more planning and both parties are dependent on it and, in turn, each other.

A day out by yourself can be enough to recharge your batteries

But that doesn't have to mean being 'stuck' with each other and doing everything together all the time. The way I find it works best is to start with communication. If there is something you want to do but your partner doesn't, or you feel you need space, look at how you can fit that into your travels.

Time out doesn't mean having to go away and stay in hotels while your partner is back in the 'van. Don't get me wrong, it absolutely can involve that! But budget, time and situation dependent, it doesn't have to. A day out by yourself can be enough to recharge your batteries. The way Jon and I do it is, we'll find a parking spot or campsite near to where I want to go and then check what transport options there are from that point. Park and rides are a great option for this! Then I head off for the day while he stays with the 'van, or we both head off, depending where that parking spot is.

I have a fold-up bike, too, so that opens up my options if public transport or walking aren't viable.

It's not always me heading out, either. Sometimes I need some time in the 'van to potter so I politely tell Jon I need him to go out for a while!

I know a lot of people treasure the quality time together that 'van travel brings, myself included. But we also get asked a lot 'how do you cope spending so much time together in a small space?' And this is our answer.

After Jon's health issues with leukaemia, quality time together is even more important to us. But we still need to look after ourselves and our own wellbeing. And if you don't have the luxury or convenience of your own campervan, it can still be achieved when travelling together!

♥ Read more about Tash and Jon's adventures at **lifebeyondbricks.co.uk** and follow them on social media

NEXT MONTH

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Jonathan Hauxwell

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